Suspended Transitions: the Liminal Stage in the Brontës' Novels

Raquel García-Cuevas García

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ABSTRACT

Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* is the first and last attempt at a traditional, generic *Bildungsroman* to be found among the adult literary production of the Brontë sisters. William Crimsworth's *Bildung* and rite of passage turn out to be linear and successful, a *vini-vidi-vinci* first-person narration which ultimately sees the hero returning home to enjoy the glories of his quest abroad. This dissertation looks at the Brontës' growing interest in narrating stories about suspended transitions, in-between states, and the representation of the psychosocial experience of the liminal hotspot, also paying attention to the stylistic challenges this approach poses for the traditional, generic *Bildungsroman*, and, more broadly, for realist conventions.

Building on anthropological theories about liminality and scapegoating, and the more recent concept of the "liminal hotspot", this dissertation explores the Brontës' interest in stories of suspended transitions within developmental narratives through the lens of anthropological work on the ritual process, showing how experiences of the liminal hotspot are at the centre of the sisters' narratives. By focusing on and dilating upon indeterminate states, the Brontës' novels depart from the generic *Bildungsroman* and propose moments of suspended transitions as the actual growth points in an individual's rite of passage since, as my analysis and close reading of the novels shows, the liminal stage does not prevent development. This approach challenges previous readings of the novels as *Bildungsromane* and proposes theories about liminality as a more fluid theoretical framework to apply to the analysis of Victorian female developmental narratives. Moreover, I show how the Brontës also resist and test the bounds of realist conventions and the generic story of maturation, thus authoring novels which blend realism, Gothic, and proto-modernism and which therefore sit in between genres.

The novels analysed in the core chapters of this work show how it is thanks to the extended experience of liminality, that is, the liminal hotspot, that the protagonists develop due to the potentiality offered by this threshold stage. Furthermore, the Brontës' interest in indeterminate states and troubled becomings also evidences the authors' disregard for traditional rites of passage. In fact, as I show through my close reading of key passages, these novels show a greater reliance on 'customized', secular rituals and relegate, if not altogether ignore, conventional rites of passage to the margins of the novels.

The experience of liminality, this work concludes, is what lies at the centre of the Brontës' writings and what grants most of the protagonists a successful reincorporation into social structure which does not involve renouncing one's identity, something which the generic *Bildungsroman* asks for. Moreover, I contend that the proto-feminist tone of the novels is sometimes foregrounded by the heroines becoming 'rebellious neophytes': a form of radical empowerment which expands their suspended transitions but which nonetheless is shown to grant the freedom considered necessary to propose new, more liberating models of womanhood.

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INTRODUCTION

A lawlike development is discerned in the individual life; each of its levels has intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher level. Life's dissonances and conflicts appear as necessary transitions to be withstood by the individual on his way towards maturity and harmony. (Dilthey 336)

Wilhelm Dilthey's well-known formulation of the *Bildungsroman* [1905] develops almost at the same time as anthropologist Arnold van Gennep's theory about rites of passage. In his seminal work *The Rites of Passage* (1908) Van Gennep identifies any change in an individual's social status, any "passage from one situation to another" – transition – as a rite of passage (10). These rites are in turn identified with "an individual's 'life crises'" (Kimball vii) – dissonances and conflicts – since the passage represents a turning-point in a person's existence. Essential to Van Gennep's theory is the tripartite structure where he distinguishes three different stages in any rite of passage: separation (preliminal), transition (liminal), and incorporation (post-liminal) (Van Gennep 10, 11, 21). Each phase is characterised by certain specific attributes and rites that make the progress possible.

The connection between Dilthey's and Van Gennep's formulations can be easily traced back through Victor Turner, key interpreter of Van Gennep's work. Turner establishes in his later works a dialogue between philosophy and anthropology with the aim of "seek[ing] a more secure foundation for studying experience" (Szakolczai "Liminality and Experience" 13). With this project in mind, Turner builds on the Diltheyan concept of "Erlebnis" and Van Gennep's tripartite structure in rites of passage to attempt to establish "structures of experience" (Turner *From Ritual to Theatre* 11-15, 63).

Given the parallels between Dilthey's and Van Gennep's formulations, I suggest that the *Bildungsroman* can be regarded as the literary counterpart to the anthropological concept of a rite of passage. What is more, the classical *Bildungsroman*, I argue, is interested in narrating fictional rites of passage where transitional periods, that is, the liminal stage, are reduced to a minimum. Only by shortening the duration of that threshold stage,[1] that "limbo of statuslessness" (Turner *Ritual Process* 97), out of all social structure, where the neophyte wanders in an unknown and unfamiliar environment and where the self has no identity, material property, or visibility (94-95) can the *Bildungsroman* invoke "notions of linear progress and coherent identity [showing] a purposeful youth advancing toward some clarity and stability of being" (Fraiman ix). Indeed, according to Franco Moretti, whose theorisation of the *Bildungsroman* has been so influential in histories of the form over the last three decades, "those novels that clearly are *not Bildungsroman*" invariably show a "'failed initiation'" or a "'problematic formation'" (*Way* 15).

Those novels that Moretti refers to as "the *Bildungsroman* of the others", because they depart from the traditional story of development which focuses on a male, white, Western hero ("Preface" ix), instead portray instances of disruption of the "everyday", that "world of confidence, familiarity, and routine actions" (Kosík 43) that for Victor Turner represents the concept of "structure" (*Ritual Process* 94).[2] That is to say, such novels are interested in the disruption or failure of the normative social order, in dilating upon the stage of liminality that the *Bildungsroman* normally seeks to minimise.

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[1] The word "liminal" comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning "threshold" or "margin". Therefore, allusions to thresholds are recurrent in theories about liminality and rites of passage.

[2] Kosík contends that the everyday "is disrupted only when millions of people are jolted out of this rhythm" (43), however, the Brontës' novels show how disruption of the everyday for an individual can trigger liminality, a statement also developed by social theorists.

As Victor Turner explains in *The Ritual Process* (1969), the most influential study and development of Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, where the concept of liminality is expanded and which has set the foundations for all subsequent studies in the field, if no mechanisms are available to cope with that moment of psychosocial fracture and feeling of non-belonging, the individual becomes immersed in liminality, a state "betwixt and between" (*Ritual Process* 95). More recently, it has been argued that if the "paradox" of rupture with the everyday

> cannot easily be escaped using existing resources it can push those involved towards the invention of new forms-of-process based on new gestalts and hence new normativities, capable of embracing a greater degree of complexity, within which the paradox can be resignified. (Greco and Stenner 155)

If this is not the case, however, the individual may remain "stuck in liminality" (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22). This threshold stage has been more recently found to be characterized by "ontological indeterminacy" and "affective volatility", and identified as a transitional stage where "potentiality is at a maximum and actuality at a minimum" (Greco and Stenner 160).

Should this standstill "acquire a certain autonomy" due to its complexity, the transitional period, as Van Gennep argues, may become "sufficiently elaborated to constitute an independent state": that is, the liminal stage may become "reduplicated" (11, 191-192). Such elaborated threshold stages have the potential to affect the three dimensions that Bjørn Thomassen, one of the most influential contemporary theorists about liminality, has identified as being liable to become affected and condense during transitional periods: time, space, and identity ("Uses and Meanings" 16-18). It is when liminality develops into an elaborated, extended stage affecting the three dimensions that we can talk about a "liminal hotspot":

an occasion of sustained uncertainty, ambivalence, and tension in which people feel "caught suspended" in the limbo of an in-between phase of transition. They may be occasions of *impasse* in which an interruption of the everyday, taken for granted state of affairs becomes permanent and the people involved become stuck, as it were, in enduring liminality. (Stenner et al. 141, 142)

Given the parallel between the *Bildungsroman* and the ritual process, the concepts of liminality in general and the liminal hotspot in particular are important heuristic devices for analysing both "the narrative logic of the classical *Bildungsroman*" (Moretti *Way* 18) and departures from it that leave the protagonist suspended in liminality. Turner equates the liminal stage to "antistructure", a realm out of a normative social model which observes "a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less'" (*Ritual Process* 94-9).

It has long been a critical commonplace that the Victorian novel concerns itself, amongst other things, with the relationship between the individual and society. In the *Bildungsroman*, as Moretti suggests, this relationship takes the form of "complementary and convergent trajectories" towards "[s]elf-development and [social] integration" (*Way* 18, 19). Nonetheless, the novels of Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë, this dissertation argues, are fascinated by moments of suspended transitions caused by the divergence of the trajectories which Moretti sees as complementary.

The richness and significance of transitional stages as they are represented in the Brontës' novels are due to the "potentiality" offered by the liminal stage and the use that the characters are shown to make of it. Turner alludes to liminality as an "interfacial region" pregnant with possibilities and hypotheses, "an interval […]

when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance" (*Ritual to Theatre* 44). As if experiencing a moment frozen in time when everything is allowed,[3] the characters in the Brontës' novels are shown to make the most of this potentiality to try and surmount liminality on their own terms, that is, by rejecting normative social structures. This state of 'freedom' also affords the possibility of experiencing "*communitas*", defined by Turner as a community of equals (*Ritual Process* 96, 97). Nonetheless, in spite of the celebratory tone with which Turner describes potentiality, suspended transitions in the Brontës' novels are represented as both liberating and dangerous due to the characters' refusal to be shaped by social standards and norms, which leaves them "stuck in liminality". Moreover, the novels also show how such explicit diversions from social order can in turn entail damaging consequences for the liminar and those around them.

In fact, the depiction of neophytes in the Brontës' novels allows for a connection between Turner's liminars and René Girard's seminal theories about "sacred violence". Turner describes "liminal entities" as having "no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands" (*Ritual Process* 95). Moreover, he notes how threshold individuals "fall in the interstices of social structure", "are on its margins", or "occupy its lowest rungs" (125). For his own part, in *The Scapegoat* (1986) Girard identifies the different "prototypes" of sacrificial victims and notes that "every individual who has difficulty adapting, someone from another country or state, an orphan, an only son, someone who is penniless, or simply the latest arrival" is prone to be chosen as scapegoat

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[3] Van Gennep notes how liminars are not expected to abide by the norms ruling society (114, 115).

(18). Furthermore, in *Violence and the Sacred* (1988) he states that "beings who are either outside or on the fringes of society" (12), that is, out of social structure in Turnerian terms, are usually regarded as "sacrificeable" (4). In their novels, the Brontës show how neophytes are regarded and treated as disposable as well as perceived as a threat to the status quo precisely due to their condition as outsiders who are not willing to abide by the norms that govern structure.

Jane Eyre and Heathcliff, for example, come to be regarded as threats to the social order precisely because, empowered by the potentiality that their liminal status grants and due to their position as outsiders, they may trigger a process of undifferentiation which might do away with the "regulated system of distinctions" which "define[s] cultural divisions" regarded as essential to maintain social balance (Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 49, 280; *The Scapegoat* 12). That is, if the polluting liminar is not restrained and is assimilated into structure without having undergone the necessary ordeals to break them down, the whole community may become 'infected', thus giving way to crisis and chaos.

In *Violence and the Sacred* Girard explores the mechanisms of sacrificial violence, its causes, outcomes, and meanings. One of the starting points for his theory is the duality of violence and how it can be related to sacredness. Looking at sacrifice, Girard establishes a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' violence. From his perspective, bad violence, being illegitimate, leads to chaos and may go on ad infinitum if it is not adequately stopped. Sacrifice, on the other hand, may be considered a form of good violence since it puts an end to chaos, thus re-establishing order and peace – it is a regenerating force (1-4). Similarly, Turner observes how the neophyte in liminality must be a "*tabula rasa*" and adds that "[t]he ordeals and

humiliations […] to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence" (*Ritual Process* 103).

Therefore, since "[the sacrificial rites'] purpose is the maintenance of the status quo" (Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 280), it is for the benefit of structural order that the neophyte is forced to occupy the place of the scapegoat so as to protect social balance. It is due to this perception of liminal characters in the Brontës as "exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of inhabitants" (*Violence and the Sacred* 12) that they become the objects of scapegoating, a fact that expands their suspended transitions.

Building on Van Gennep's and Turner's work, Bjørn Thomassen has further developed theories about liminality and applied them to industrialised societies. Together with adopting his model about the three dimensions of liminality and how they can interact and condense, this dissertation also builds on his analysis of the dangers of liminality, which he also relates to Girard's concept of scapegoating. While Turner sees liminality as full of positive potentiality and a stage that encourages creativity (*Ritual Process* 128), an aspect that Homi Bhabha replicates in his discussion of the "Third Space" (53-56),[4] throughout his work, Thomassen has argued that "over-romanticizing the liminal experience" (*Liminality and the Modern* 83) and celebrating potentiality as "limitless freedom" ("Thinking with Liminality" 56) may be problematic because "without reintegration liminality is pure danger" ("Uses and Meanings" 22). In fact, although Turner alludes to the "institutionalization of liminality" in the "monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions" (*Ritual Process* 107), he sees this as part of the structure of these

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[4] Although Bhabha does not make any explicit allusion to Turner's theories about liminality, his use of the term and the relationship he establishes between liminal spaces and his "Third Space" or "third dimension" are strong enough for critics to notice the Turnerian influence. See Kalua, and Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern* 8.

societies, a fact which deprives liminality of its characteristic "antistructural" component. Thomassen, on the other hand, notes that this understanding of liminality as a (permanent) state of freedom distorts Van Gennep's initial formulation of the liminal stage as a transitional state (*Liminality and the Modern* 85) and warns about the risk of becoming "stuck" in liminality for the neophyte who wants to transcend this limbo state.

Informed by the anthropological and social theories about rites of passage and scapegoating already mentioned, this dissertation adds to the body of interdisciplinary scholarship in the field of Brontë studies (Lewis 198) and expands it by providing a new approach based on a comprehensive analysis of the sisters' novels through the lens of theories about liminality and the recent concept of the "liminal hotspot". This approach allows for an intervention in the understanding of the Brontës' protagonists by showing how through their characterization, the authors challenge the notion that the successful *Bildungsroman* needs a "pliant" (Moretti *Way* 21), "tempered" protagonist (31), who "accommodates himself [sic] to society by resigning himself [sic] to accept its life forms" (Lukács 136). In fact, far from "willingly agree[ing] to be determined from without" (Moretti *Way* 21), the protagonists in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), and *Villette* (1853) refuse integration in the social order and extend their suspended transitions to avoid, as much as possible, "the detriment and eventual annulment of 'freedom'" (Moretti *Way* 8). *The Professor* ([1846] 1857), *Shirley* (1849), and *Agnes Grey* (1847), on the other hand, narrate stories of development where there is no occasion for the experience of a liminal hotspot even if the

characters undergo liminality in some "degree" (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 17).[5]

I use Georg Lukács's and Franco Moretti's work on the *Bildungroman* as arguably the most notable twentieth-century interventions in the field, and the ones which have definitely triggered a most heated critical discussion. Considered key interpreters of the genre from Goethe's writings and Dilthey's theorisations onwards, their influence on critical discussions about the *Bildungsroman* is still very much alive today, specially Moretti's, who, building extensively on Lukács, presents in *The Way of the World* [1987] an especially constraining view of the genre which 'others' any story of development which is not narrated from the centre. These critics' prescriptive take on the *Bildungsroman* has, in turn, triggered many feminist responses which have been key for my work.

The works of Susan Fraiman and Elizabeth Abel et al., among others, have provided me with the necessary insight to analyse how the Brontës' focus on suspended transitions challenges the generic *Bildungsroman* and speaks to further women's writing about stories of female development. Such critics have noted how "[e]ven the broadest definitions of the *Bildungsroman* presuppose a range of social options available only to men" (Abel et al. 7). These options, the very possibility of "choice" (Fraiman 5), are what Moretti refers to as male "full social freedom" and "social privileges" without which "the *Bildungsroman* was difficult to write, because it was difficult to imagine" ("Preface" ix, x). In fact, although major studies on the development of the *Bildungsroman* in England have been written by men, the concept of "linear progress" has been highlighted by female feminist critics of the genre (Fraiman ix) who have noticed how at a stylistic level a linear plot is at odds

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[5] Thomassen distinguishes different degrees of liminality according to "the intensiveness of the liminal moment or period" ("Uses and Meanings" 17).

with "lyricism". Elisha Cohn, among others, identifies a tension in narratives of female development where lyrical moments work to interrupt the "forward-looking plot of individual self-formation" (4). These critics' reflections on questions of "narrative disunity" and *plural formations*" [emphasis in the original] (Fraiman 12) have been central to the development of some of my arguments about the relation between suspended transitions, split identity, and fluid style in the Brontës' narratives, where different modes of telling come together to better convey what it means to be "stuck" in liminality. Moreover, the different female characters in the Brontës' novels are portrayed as searching for a "distinctive female 'I'" (Abel et al. 10) which, once found, allows for the protagonist's reintegration in society, thus showing how this quest for a female identity of one's own leads to "more conflicted, less direct" developmental courses (11).

Furthermore, in her recent study of moments of "still life" in the Victorian novel, Elisha Cohn explores "novels that establish developmental plots but withhold their assent, at least a little while, from allowing their characters to find accommodation in a common world" (184) by means of the introduction of lyricism. Cohn understands these "suspensions within developmental narrative" (3) as describing "an exemption from action that holds force at bay" (f.n. 16, 198) and further argues that "[t]o suspend development is to delay the *Bildungsroman*'s ideal fusion of epistemology and ethics, and to defer images of social transformation" (29). Although I am also concerned to explore states of suspension, Cohn's focus on perceptual experience and states of "diminished awareness and volition" (3) draws upon science and affect studies. It thus differs from my account of moments of suspended transition through anthropological work on the ritual process. In fact, I

analyse moments of suspended transitions as instances that defer the individual's re-incorporation into structure but which do not preclude activity or development.

Notable previous approaches to the Brontës' novels through anthropological theories include Sarah Gilead's, Mark Hennelly Jr.'s, and James Buzard's. All three critics have focused on Charlotte Brontë's works, especially *Jane Eyre*. In fact, Gilead refers to *Jane Eyre* as "the paradigmatic liminal novel of the Victorian period" ("Liminality and Antiliminality in Charlotte Brontë's Novels" 303). Building on Nina Auerbach's work on the figure of the fictional orphan, Gilead provides an interesting analysis of Victorian orphan novels which she classifies as "liminal" or "anti-liminal". Theories about rites of passage inform her argument that "[a] major preoccupation of the novel concerns the failure of rituals of transition" since "traditional methods of facilitating the individual's entrance into clearly defined psychosocial spaces and into positive relation to divine forces, no longer work" ("Liminality, Anti-Liminality, and the Victorian Novel" 186, 187). Gilead's analysis, therefore, is interested in the relation between the Victorian fictional orphan, which she considers the hallmark of the category she refers to as Victorian liminal novels ("Liminality and Antiliminality in Charlotte Brontë's Novels" 303), and the way in which these characters manage to become assimilated in a society and culture which are in constant transition, and eventually "generat[e] a success story cum *Bildungsroman*" (302). My analysis, however, does not attempt to establish a taxonomy and is more influenced by feminist readings which establish a difference between female and male orphans' stories of development. Together with Gilead's work, Mark Hennelly Jr.'s essay about liminality in *Jane Eyre* provides an interesting account of all the liminal elements he can discern in key passages of the novel. That is, he provides a reading of *Jane Eyre* where he is able to identify scenes,

objects, etc. which have a liminal and ritualistic quality in Turnerian terms. My work further develops the meaningfulness of liminality in relation to the protagonist's process of becoming and pays attention to her complete rite of passage.

James Buzard's *Disorienting Fiction* (2005) has been influential in helping to develop a literary analysis through anthropology. His reading of certain Victorian novels as doing proto-auto-ethnographic work provides an interesting and rich perspective upon how nineteenth-century fiction shows Victorian cultural discourses in the making. However, Buzard's study is grounded on socio-cultural anthropology while mine is based on structural anthropology. Nonetheless, I build on some of his analysis of Charlotte Brontë's novels and expand the notion of a recurrent "master trope of expulsion or purgation" (159), which I argue is present in the three sisters' prose. Moreover, together with Anne Longmuir's essay "'Reader, Perhaps You were Never in Belgium?'" (2009), Buzard's work has been key to my analysis of representations of foreignness in the Brontës' novels and to the consideration of questions of dislocation and alienation both abroad and at home, and the impact these experiences have for characters such as Lucy Snowe and William Crimsworth.

This dissertation also shows how the Brontës' interest in representations of suspended transitions and their complexity challenges the notion that "births, marriages, and deaths [mark] the most crucial threshold events of a Victorian life" (Waters 66) and displaces adolescence as the most significant transitional period (Bilston 6-8). Sarah Bilston's, Carolyn Dever's, and Reynolds and Humble's works on the "orphan-convention" in Victorian literature (Reynold and Humble 26) and representations of adolescence in the Victorian novel have been instrumental to my analysis of orphanhood as the initial cause for suspended transitions in the Brontës' novels and how the liminal stage may get complicated by the figure of the absent

mother. Although I consider orphanhood to be a liminal attribute that can be redressed by means of kinship, quite often liminality in the Brontës' texts is initially caused – though very rarely narrated – by the rite of separation from the parents.

Sarah Bilston's *The Awkward Age* (2004) has been especially useful for thinking about how the Brontës' novels depart from traditional representations of adolescence and coming-out and instead provide more oblique portrayals of the moment of "incorporation into the world of sexuality" (Van Gennep 67) which nonetheless have a very rich ritualistic nature. In fact, taken in a literal, spatial sense, the Brontës' heroines only rarely come *out*. Patsy Stoneman's argument about Jane Eyre's going to school representing a "voyage out" (34) has been especially influential for reflecting on how the characters whose transitions have been suspended relate to space and has led me to argue that the Brontës' heroines in liminality mainly exist in closed spaces. Jane Eyre, especially, keeps enacting voyages *in* until she is re-assimilated into society. This relation to space, moreover, is shown to be influenced by gender: William Crimsworth and Heathcliff are the liminars whose space opens up more easily.

Building on such works, I have been able to identify how traditional rites of passage such as the coming-out, when not ignored altogether, are only granted a marginal place in the Brontës' narratives with dubious, if not completely unsuccessful, results. What the Brontës' novels portray, in contrast, are many secular rites performed from a position outside of social structure. The potentiality inherent in the role of the "outsider within" (Reynolds and Humble 102) allows the Brontës'

protagonists to challenge the status quo,[6] enact rebellions, and be free from the constraints of structure. Building on Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's ground-breaking work *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) and their concept of "Byronic heroine" (338) in particular, the pattern of rebellions from the margins that some of the Brontës' heroines are shown to enact has led me to label these characters as "rebellious neophytes". That is, although in a position of marginality and dislocation, the liminars in the Brontës' novels are shown to enact a process of radical empowerment which allows them to reject from the position of the rejected, a pattern which mirrors the dual nature of potentiality in the liminal stage.

Moreover, my close-reading of the novels evidences how suspended transitions, triggered in most cases by unsuccessful initiations or refusal to be assimilated on the status quo's (structural) terms, are the making of the Brontës' protagonists, especially the heroines. These threshold moments are depicted as the only way towards a true "reconciliation between interiority and reality" – which Lukács conceives as the main aim of the hero in the generic *Bildungsroman* (132) – that does not endanger one's identity, if such an outcome is possible at all. In other words, the Brontës' novels show their protagonists mature mainly "outside the world-as-homeland" (Moretti *Way* 19), that is: out of structure and immersed in a disrupted "everyday". It is when liminality is overcome that maturity has been achieved and the characters are shown to enact what Thomassen calls a "home-coming" (*Liminality and the Modern* 17). Therefore, the critical understanding of the logic of the "'transition' space" in the classical *Bildungsroman*, which "often associated with youth, is narrow, severely regulated, and merely functional to the

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[6] I first came across the concept of the "outsider within" in the ethnographical work of Patricia Hill Collins, who 'coined' the term in 1986 to refer to the marginal position occupied by black women in Academia. Collins's term has gained currency in the field of Postcolonial and African Studies. Since Collins's use predates Reynolds and Humble's I have decided not to use it in my analysis of the Brontës' heroines for ethical reasons. See Collins for a development of the term.

passage from the infantile incorporation to the adult one" (Moretti *Way* f.n.39, 251), is challenged by my reading of the Brontës, in whose works, I argue, transition spaces are anything but "merely functional".

By focusing on instances of suspended transitions and troubled becomings, *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *Villette*, I argue, not only challenge generic models of developmental narrative, but they also test the bounds of nineteenth-century realist conventions. Due to the fluidity of the concept itself, I contend that experiences of the liminal hotspot prove to require equally fluid modes of telling. For this reason, I suggest, there is a correlation between heightened experiences of liminality and variety of narrative style. In other words, the more elaborated the experience of the liminal hotspot, the more complex the novels become from a stylistic point of view. For this reason, the Brontës' novels which can be said to follow traditional realist conventions more closely – *The Professor*, *Shirley*, and *Agnes Grey* – do not depict instances of suspended transitions with the same narrative force as *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *Villette*, since the latter benefit from a stylistic complexity that allows the "psychosocial experience" (Greco and Stenner 148) of the liminal hotspot to be conveyed more distinctly. Nonetheless, *The Professor*, *Shirley*, and *Agnes Grey* do portray different rites of passage which necessarily depict some instances of liminality even if this threshold stage may be reduced to a minimum. Being so, analysing key passages in these three novels offers an introductory overview of the approach that this dissertation follows.

In fact, my analysis shows how the Brontës' interest in suspended transitions and the stylistic in-betweenness of their writings can be seen to grow when looking across the oeuvre of the sisters who wrote more than one novel, especially in

Charlotte, the most prolific novelist. In *The Professor* ([1846] 1857), Charlotte's first completed novel, the author introduces her work as the story of a hero "work[ing] his way through life as [she] had seen real living men work theirs" ("Preface" 3). By presenting a developmental narrative derived from real life, many contemporary readers may have expected a short *Bildungsroman* fashioned according to Victorian realist conventions. In fact, the author's comparison between the novel's protagonist and other "real living men" positions William Crimsworth almost as a representative of those other men; as a hero who is "picked out of an unlimited number of men who share his aspirations, and is placed at the centre of the narrative only because his seeking and finding reveal the world's totality most clearly" (Lukács 134).[7] Actually, it is not long before William Crimsworth himself reassures readers that the novel is intended as a *Bildung*: "My narrative is not exciting and, above all, not marvellous – but it may interest some individuals, who, having toiled on the same vocation as myself, will find in my experience, frequent reflections of their own" (*The Professor* 12). The allusion to a biographical narrative focused on the hero's "toil" and "vocation" which may be useful to others further points to a novel of self-formation or apprenticeship and suggests that "the reading too is intended to be a formative process" (Moretti *Way* 56).

However, refusing to dwell "on the ornamented and redundant in composition" ("Preface" 3), Charlotte Brontë discarded the romantic impetus that some would consider essential to the *Bildung*, and so was reproached, as she

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[7] Informed by the extensive biographical work available about the Brontë family, I read Charlotte's allusion to "real living men … working [their way through life]" as a validation of her own work and pseudonym. On the one hand, *The Professor* has long been recognised as a re-telling of her stay in Belgium and her infatuation with M. Héger. On the other hand, prior to Charlotte's trips to London after the success of *Jane Eyre*, the Brontës' circle of male acquaintances was very much reduced to Patrick's curates and the locals, most of whom worked either in farming or textile industries. It is true however, that the Brontë sisters needn't have looked far for an example of male privilege and opportunities taking into account how the family made every effort to provide Branwell with an artistic career and several fresh starts in life, even if his was never a linear progress.

subsequently explains, for not providing "something more imaginative and poetical –
something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a native taste for
pathos – with sentiments more tender – elevated – unworldly" (3).[8] But in remaining
true to the commitment of portraying the progress of an individual representative of
other "real living men", Brontë could not but offer the depiction of a linear progress
with very little lyricism. For this reason, there has been a tendency to compare *The
Professor* and *Villette*, the first and the last of Charlotte's novels, both of them set in
Brussels, to show how, stylistically, they stand almost at opposite poles. Needless to
say, *Villette*, which I analyse in Chapter 4, narrates the development of a woman and
evidences the need for a more inclusive, gender-aware approach to both novels of
development and rites of passage.

In fact, *The Professor* itself, although not a novel in three volumes, is
nonetheless made up of three distinct narratives when considered from the
perspective of the anthropological work I am drawing upon: William Crimsworth's
rite of passage, a proto-ethnographic account of sorts covering his first weeks in
Brussels, and Frances Henri's rite of passage. Thus, this novel offers the possibility
of analysing and comparing male and female stories of development, a pattern that
Brontë revisits and complicates in *Shirley*, where Shirley Keeldar's masculine traits
are shown to allow for a smoother process of development than in Caroline
Helstone's case.

The Professor, then, starts with a matter-of-fact account of William's choices
in life already attesting to the easiness that usually meets the *Bildung* hero when
compared to the protagonist in a story of female development. In a letter to a friend
from his days at Eton – already a distinctive setting characteristic of male stories of

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[8] It is well known that the manuscript for *The Professor* was rejected on multiple occasions. In fact,
not even George Smith, Charlotte's publisher, was eager to bring the work before the public. Thus
The Professor was published posthumously in 1857.

development – William Crimsworth, an orphan, explains how his father had been a tradesman whose marriage to William's mother made her and her offspring repudiated by her aristocratic family. Nonetheless, his maternal uncles would later decide to pay for his education at Eton, thus showing how, although dependent, William enjoys the privileges of his sex and class (7). Upon leaving Eton he is offered the living of the unpromising parish of Seacombe-cum-Scaife and the possibility of one day marrying one of his cousins into the bargain,[9] which William *chooses* to refuse, giving offence to his uncles and precluding all possibility of further help from them (6). It is then that William *decides* to ask his brother Edward for employment at his prosperous mill (6-8). It is thus that in spite of being an orphan and so far dependent on his relatives, William's destitution is easily cut short by writing a letter to his brother and asking for help (8), a pattern that is repeated throughout the novel showing how mechanisms for securing the smooth operation of the ritual process favour men.

The four chapters devoted to the protagonist's three-month stay at Bigben Close portray William's failed initiation in the world of trade with his brother Edward as master of ceremonies – the "ritual elder" (Turner *Ritual Process* 96) who needs to guide the neophyte out of liminality – thus showing a hero in liminality, a neophyte who cannot escape the ordeals proper to this stage and who has been marked as outcast. During a party held by Edward for his employees and friends, William notes the otherness of his own position, the paradox of being "included *as* excluded" (Kofoed and Stenner 176): "Mr Crimsworth […] glanced at me, I looked weary, solitary, kept-down – like some solitary tutor or governess – he was satisfied" (20). Like Agnes Grey or Jane Eyre, William Crimsworth, "formally invited in, but

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[9] Seacombe is a district in the county of Merseyside, in the North West of England. Scaife, however, is not a real location but an adjective derived from Old Norse meaning "awry" or "difficult".

implicitly cast out" (Kofoed and Stenner 177), is forced to witness and narrate from the margins by Edward, who, as representative of the status quo, can have an impact on the initiand's assimilation into structure.

Limen and margin are different spatial concepts in as much as "that which is interstitial [liminal] is neither marginal nor on the outside" but rather "in an in-between position" (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 8). Significantly, however, both are "boundary-concepts" (7). Thus, on a social level, people who inhabit the margin, periphery, or border of a given community can be said to exist in a threshold space between in and out, that is "included *as* excluded". Furthermore, although liminality does not necessarily entail marginality, marginal individuals or groups are especially prone to be liminars. In fact, both Turner and Girard discuss the quality of marginality as a common marker of liminality and/or scapegoating (Turner *Ritual Process* 111, 125, 167; Girard *The Scapegoat* 18), and Thomassen accounts for "borderlands" as liminal spaces ("Uses and Meanings" 16).

Moreover, and given the importance of the spatial dimension in liminality,[10] I argue that those individuals who have been purposely displaced onto the margins by those inhabiting the centre, as is the case with William Crimsworth, are being kept in liminality by the desire of those belonging to structure to maintain a system of differences that prevents crisis. In other words, the outsiders' possible transition into assimilation is being prevented by those who belong, and therefore, have the power to grant admittance. This spatial demarcation has an effect on the individual's identity: it is through the dynamics of othering those on the margins that the centre maintains its status and privileges, and "the Other" remains stuck in the periphery. Building on Edward Said's seminal work about the construction of the Orient which

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[10] Thomassen argues that "[h]aving essentially to do with an in-between *position*, the point of departure for any analysis of liminality must be spatial" (*Liminality and the Modern* 11).

shows how divisions were artificially created to maintain the binary opposition between "them" and "us" (43) which benefited the centre by keeping the periphery suspended in a disadvantaged position, I argue that being forced to inhabit the margins precludes the possibility of incorporation.

Thus, William, as neophyte relegated to the margins, faces "[l]ife's dissonances and conflicts" which "as necessary transitions to be withstood by the individual on his way towards maturity and harmony" (Dilthey 336) make him realise "the discrepancy between the interiority and the world", a recognition which Lukács considers key in the process of maturation of the successful *Bildung* hero (136):

> No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of his profession […] From the first week of my residence in X   I felt my occupation irksome […] but had that been all, I should long have borne with the nuisance […] I should have endured in silence the rust and cramp of my best faculties; I should not have whispered, even inwardly, that I longed for liberty; I should have pent in every sigh by which my heart might have ventured to intimate its distress under the closeness, smoke, monotony and joyless tumult of Bigben Close, and its panting desire for freer and fresher scenes […] But this was not all; the Antipathy, which had sprung up between myself and my Employer […] excluded me from every glimpse of the sunshine of life; and I began to feel like a plant growing in humid darkness out of the slimy walls of a well. (25)

William Crimsworth's reflections show how the character feels alienated from the world outside Bigben Close and its society alike. His "best faculties", acquired and nurtured during his time at Eton, prevent his assimilation into the industrial landscape and the "irksome" world of trade. This feeling of exclusion, accentuated

by William's estrangement from Edward, whom "[he] had long ceased to regard […] as [his] brother" (26), evidences the hero's immersion in the liminal stage, which he identifies with stagnation.

The passage conveys how William follows what according to Lukács is required of the hero in a *Bildungsroman*: he tries to "[accommodate] himself to society by resigning himself to accept its life forms, and by locking inside himself and keeping entirely to himself the interiority which can only be realised inside the soul" (136). William Crimsworth comes forward as the "tempered" and "pliant" hero that the successful, generic *Bildung* asks for (Moretti *Way* 31, 21): the neophyte who is expected to be "passive or humble" and who "must obey [his] instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint" (Turner *Ritual Process* 95). This accommodation, or resignation rather, expected from the hero of the classical *Bildungsroman* and the neophyte in liminality is considered key by theorists for the reconciliation between the self and society that will allow the individual to re-enter structure (Lukács 132; Turner *Ritual Process* 103).

In fact, William's feelings of alienation and regression are echoed in *Jane Eyre*, where the heroine also desires, gasps, and prays for liberty (87), and expresses her longing "for a power of vision which might overpass" the walls and gates that delimit her existence (110), and the need for "exercise for [her] faculties" (111). Nonetheless, as the chapters in this dissertation show, gender plays a key role in the available options out of liminality for men and women in the Victorian period as portrayed in the Brontës' fiction. While William Crimsworth is disenchanted with the path he has chosen, he is willing to submit, and it is the master of ceremony who prevents his assimilation. In fact, it is when Edward Crimsworth fires him that

William can benefit from the options available to a man while still complying with the generic model of hero of the traditional *Bildung*.

> A load was lifted off my heart, I felt light and liberated. I had got away from Bigben Close without a breach of resolution; without injury to my self-respect: I had not forced Circumstances, Circumstances had freed me; Life was again open to me; no longer was its horizon limited by the black wall surrounding Crimsworth's Mill. (37)

This feeling of openness and expanded horizons which Jane Eyre is also shown to long for comes to William without his asking for it. William Crimsworth thereby conforms to the role given to the hero in the classical *Bildungsroman* who "leaves to others the task of shaping his life" (Moretti *Way* 21), exactly the opposite attitude to that shown by Jane Eyre, who overtly rejects her several masters of ceremonies precisely because the traditional options available to women do not lead either to happiness or freedom, as Chapter 2 in this dissertation explores.[11]

Although it may seem that losing his job might lead William to a situation of utter destitution, the male public sphere in *The Professor* is depicted as a transnational network of influence and patronage that soon leads the hero to a fixed position in structure:

> [W]ith that in your pocket you will run no risk of finding yourself in a state of absolute destitution which, I know, you would regard as degradation, so should I for that matter; the person, to whom you will present it, generally has two or three respectable places depending upon his recommendation. (44)

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[11] According to Moretti "the classical *Bildungsroman* plot posits 'happiness' as the highest value, but only to the detriment and eventual annulment of 'freedom'" (*Way* 8).

So Mr Hunsden tells William upon producing a letter of introduction which eases the hero's progress from Bigben Close in the north of England to Mr Brown's "breakfast room" in Rue Royale, Brussels (49). This "elderly gentleman, very grave, business-like and respectable looking" (49) can, in a first interview, "promise" William a place as "Professor of English and Latin" at M. Pelet's "large establishment" because Monsieur "will not refuse a professor recommended by [him]" (50).[12]

At this point in the novel, although William Crimsworth has not yet spent a full day in Brussels, he has already attained a fixed point in structure when just a few pages back he was shown to be despairing at the prospect of having to make a living in an industrial town under his brother's tyrannical rule. Hence my argument that it is upon being made welcome into the Brussels' male public sphere that William Crimsworth's process of development, his rite of passage, and therefore his *Bildung*, come to an end. Only by resolving William Crimsworth's life crisis in the first fifty pages of the novel and taking him towards the stage of "harmony" that his position in Brussels entails could Charlotte Brontë present in a way derived from real life the "wide cultural formation, professional mobility, [and] full social freedom" that are "the very elements that characterize the *Bildungsroman* as a form" and which are invariably impersonated by "the west European middle-class [man]" (Moretti "Preface" ix).

William's transition from liminality to re-assimilation is made so smooth in the novel that the territorial passage from England to Belgium is barely taken into account; in fact there is no allusion to the crossing of the Channel (46-48). This omission not only offers a great contrast to Lucy Snowe's territorial passage in *Villette*, but it also challenges literary and anthropological notions about the

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[12] Similarly, later in the narrative M. Vandenhuten's influence contrives to get William a much better position at "   College, Brussels" (178).

meaningfulness of a change of territory. In the *Bildungsroman*, as well as in other types of narrative, "the crossing of a spatial border is usually also the decisive event of the narrative structure" (Moretti *Atlas* 46) because it leads the hero to one of the "great capital cities" which are considered "the natural goal of all young men of talent" (64). That is, in the same way as critics see the hero in the generic *Bildung* enacting a journey towards themselves (Lukács 80) so do they travel across geographical space with the aim of achieving the reconciliation between self and society.

Similarly, within anthropological accounts of the ritual process, Van Gennep establishes a parallel between rites of passage and territorial passages by "correlate[ing] spatial or geographical progression with the ritual marking of cultural 'passages'" (Bell *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* 99). As it is, Van Gennep points to the importance of "territorial passages" as illustrative examples of the tripartite structure of separation-transition-incorporation that he identifies in any rite of passage since they involve physical and spatial demarcation and progress (15-25). It is for this reason that Van Gennep regards the crossing of thresholds, either physical or otherwise, as representative of one self's union "with a new world" (20). Nonetheless, Van Gennep's formulation takes the existence of a 'home' – a place from which the individual is separated and to which they return – for granted. The Brontës' novels, however, show homeless characters enacting territorial passages without undergoing any special preliminary rites of separation or incorporation because these changes of territory are carried out within the liminal stage.

Moreover, in spite of the meaningfulness attached to the moment of emigration by literary critics and anthropologists alike, it has been observed that accounts of the passage from England to the continent in Victorian novels are

usually brief and "a chapter break suffices for characters' movements from one space to another" (Mathieson 99). Such is the case in *The Professor*, where William Crimsworth omits any allusion to the crossing of the Channel and instead offers an account of his first impressions of the new land:

> When I [...] found myself on the road to Brussels, nothing could look vapid to me. My sense of enjoyment possessed an edge whetted to the finest, untouched, keen, exquisite [...] Liberty I clasped in my arms for the first time [...] I gazed often, and always with delight from the window of the diligence [...] it was through streaming and starless darkness my eye caught the first gleam of the lights of Brussels. I saw little of the city but its lights, that night. Having alighted from the diligence, a fiacre conveyed me to the Hotel de   where I had been advised by a fellow-traveller to put up. (46, 47)

William Crimsworth's memories of his first hours in Brussels – the final stage of his territorial passage – are marked by the potentiality that the neophyte may experience in liminality and project the pattern of "death and rebirth" observed in rites of passage (Van Gennep 182): William is a new man who had "never experienced a freer sense of exhilaration" (*The Professor* 48).

However, given how the male sphere is portrayed in *The Professor*, and taking into account how important it is for the hero of the *Bildungsroman* to be shaped from without, I argue that William's is rather a state of pseudo-potentiality, since his path is still marked by his betters, whom he has willingly accepted as masters of ceremonies:

> I, a bondsman just released from the yoke, freed for one week, from twenty-one years of constraint, must, of necessity, resume the fetters of dependency; hardly had I tasted the delight of being without a master, when duty issued her stern mandate:

"Go forth and seek another service" […] impossible to enjoy a leisurely walk over the city […] until I had first presented Mr. Hunsden's letter of introduction. (49)

It is thus that William's liminality is depicted in line with Giles's argument that this is a stage which provides a privileged point of view because it grants the neophyte a power of vision that works both backwards and forwards (33). In this respect William Crimsworth's experience of liminality is shown to differ from the other protagonists' in the Brontës' novels and this difference precludes the possibility of analysing the hero from the perspective of suspended transitions. William Crimsworth does not experience a liminal hotspot because the transitions – life crises – so essential to the generic novel of development and rites of passage are easily overcome and lead the hero to a successful outcome before liminality becomes the 'new normal'. That is, William's liminal stage is not elaborated enough to become reduplicated (Van Gennep 11) and one cannot observe the condensation of time, space, and identity that would imply a state of "pure liminality" (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 18) and therefore a liminal hotspot: a very different experience from Heathcliff's, Jane Eyre's, Helen Graham's, and Lucy Snowe's.

Once William Crimsworth starts working as an English teacher, he is portrayed occupying a position that further supports the argument that his *Bildung* and rite of passage are concluded because he has a fixed point in structure which empowers him:

It did not require very keen observation to detect the character of the youth of Brabant, but it needed a certain degree of tact to adapt one's measures to their capacity. Their intellectual capacities were generally weak, their animal propensities strong; thus there was at once an impotence and a kind of inert force in their natures, they were dull, but they were also singularly stubborn […] it would have been truly

absurd to exact from them much in the way of mental exertion; having short memories, dense intelligence, feeble reflective powers – they recoiled with repugnance from any occupation that demanded close study or deep thought; had the abhorred effort been extorted from them […] they would have resisted as obstinately, as clamorously as desperate swine. (56)

Although William Crimsworth is a foreigner in Belgium and as such he is in a position which could potentially turn him into an outcast, his approach to the locals shows the opposite. He is depicted as the colonialist who constructs the natives as the inferior, primitive, atavistic "Other"; he is shown to feel empowered over his students not only due to his position as teacher, but also as an Englishman.[13]

This attainment of mastery that is conveyed by William's attitude towards his 'foreign' students lends further to support the view that the hero's process of apprenticeship has finished (Fraiman 5). In fact, as soon as Frances Henri is introduced in the narrative, William is shown to assume the role of master of ceremonies and the pattern of the master-novice relationship is visible until the end of the novel, thus offering the reader the chance to observe the complexities and differences associated with a female rite of passage in the form of a developmental narrative.

An orphan born in Geneva of an English mother and a Swiss father, Frances Henri is also a liminal character. Frances's social and cultural in-betweenness is the main cause of her liminality, which is stressed by her double nationality as much as by her undefined role in society. Introduced to William as "not a pupil of the house" but "in one sense, a teacher" (97), Frances is shown to exist in a limbo. Moreover,

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[13] Anne Longmiur has read "Lucy Snowe's and William Crimsworth's employment as English teachers as a strategy of counter-colonization, an attempt to replace French cultural dominance with British cultural dominance" (180).

although she shares the trait of orphanhood with William, her being a woman is shown to make a difference in the possibilities available to her to escape liminality:

> In Switzerland I have done but little, learnt but little, and seen but little; my life there was in a circle; I walked the same round every day […] I begged my Aunt to go to Brussels; my existence is no larger here because I am no richer or higher – I walk in as narrow a limit, but the scene is changed […] here I only teach sewing, I can shew no power in sewing, no superiority […] I am isolated; I am too a heretic, which deprives me of influence […] I would rather submit to English pride than to Flemish coarseness […] I long to live among Protestants, they are more honest than Catholics. (120, 121)

While for William escaping Bigben Close meant an almost immediate enlargement of space and horizons, the character of Frances shows how a change of scene may lead to "as narrow a limit". Excluded from the male network of influence, Frances's existence remains equally constrained wherever she goes. She is stuck in liminality because she feels that her development has been arrested. This feeling of stagnation is the same malaise that Charlotte Brontë's subsequent female characters, with the exception of Shirley Keeldar, complain of and try to surmount.

There is reason to think that Frances is experiencing a liminal hotspot due to the extended suspended transition she acknowledges feeling trapped in. However, because Frances's account is part of William's story, and is therefore dependent on his, her experiences are difficult to analyse in depth. Her feelings of stagnation and alienation derive from her in-between identity in relation to the society she inhabits, and to the nation as a whole. In Brussels she is "isolated", and a "heretic" due to her social status and Protestant upbringing respectively. However, in Switzerland her life was also a "circle". Frances's feelings illustrate how the transition between different

"circles of activity" – different stages in a rite of passage – can become interrupted and produce an ever-lasting feeling of entrapment – a liminal hotspot (Greco and Stenner 149). Furthermore, Frances's constant allusions to her desire to live in England – "her Promised Land" (208) – highlight the importance of the psychological and emotional component of a liminal hotspot. Her longing "to live among Protestants" points to the emotional need of belonging.

Although the concept of the liminal hotspot refers to a "psychosocial experience", its psychological dimension, I argue, has not been fully explored. In fact, although work has been done about the relationship between affectivity and liminality, it has mainly focused on how experiences of the liminal hotspot are characterised by "affective volatility" (Greco and Stenner 160), which has led Georgsen and Thomassen to argue that "[w]ithout affectivity, there is no liminality" (211). Furthermore, Stenner and Moreno-Gabriel have analysed how "affects and emotions are liminal phenomena of transition" (242). Nonetheless, while these studies focus on liminality and its relations to affect, this dissertation offers a more holistic approach and argues that a successful rite of passage can only be achieved if the emotional aspect of liminality is also accounted for and overcome, an aspect especially relevant in the case of Lucy Snowe.

William's and Frances's different liminal experiences invite an analysis of liminality from the perspective of gender. The contrast between the ways out of liminality available to William and Frances evidences the influence of gender on a rite of passage, a fact that has been traditionally overlooked in theories about liminality from Victor Turner onwards. While Turner refers to the disappearance of all distinctive traits among neophytes (*Ritual Process* 103), a comparison between both characters shows how Turner's assertion does not hold, at least when applied to

industrialised societies. Indeed, feminist critics in the fields of anthropology and literature alike have shown that gender needs to be accounted for if we aim at providing a faithful analysis of the differences between male and female rites of passage and stories of development.

Feminist anthropologists' challenge and subversion of the traditional male bias in the discipline has run parallel to feminist literary criticism. One of the first and most influential works within this trend is Ranya Reiter's *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (1975), which highlights the absence of women in the grand narrative about cultures and the evolution of the human species mainly due to the fact that "[m]en's information is too often presented as a group's reality rather than as only part of a cultural whole" (Reiter 12). Similarly, feminist literary criticism has focused on "the rift experienced by women writers in a patriarchal society" (Jacobus 10) and has shown how the traditional *Bildung* has failed to account for gender "as a pertinent category, despite the fact that the sex of the protagonist modifies every aspect of a particular *Bildungsroman*: its narrative structure, its implied psychology, its representation of social pressures" (Abel et al. 4, 5). Studying the distinct traits of narratives of female development has evidenced how "[t]he heroine's developmental course is more conflicted, less direct" (Abel et al. 11) than that sanctioned by critics like Lukács and Moretti for the traditional *hero*, and therefore needs its own conceptual framework to "account for specifically female experience" (5).

This acknowledgment has led feminist critics to identify several patterns within stories of female development. The dynamics of these different models usually go in the opposite direction to the generic male *Bildungsroman*. The "spiritual *Bildung*", for example, observes a "plot of inner development [which] traces a discontinuous, circular path which, rather than moving forward, culminates

in a return to origins" (Hirsch 26). Similarly, the "novel of awakening" follows a female protagonist whose "movement is inward" and only awakes to the limitations of her reality (Rosowski 49). This tendency of the heroine to move inwards is linked to the fact that progress in male terms involves choice and opportunity, something only rarely available for the "middle-class female protagonist" who usually has a compromising relation with mentors (Fraiman 5-6). Nonetheless, the potentiality afforded by the liminal stage, I argue, offers the heroines whose transition has been suspended the opportunity of escaping such constraining models.

However, as I have been arguing, *The Professor* is intended as a *Bildungsroman*, and therefore, although at this stage in the novel the plot revolves around Frances's rite of passage, William's role as master of ceremonies is superimposed on her and her story. The hero vindicates his position as master and salvager of Englishness thus reinforcing the colonializing attitude he has shown throughout his stay in Brussels. Indeed, William's initial interest in Frances is kindled once he hears her English pronunciation. Used to having the English language "lisped, stuttered, mumbled and jabbered" by his pupils, William cannot help "look[ing] up in amazement" when he hears "a voice of Albion" (105). Lighted by this stimulation, William begins to contemplate Frances as a neophyte: "'I will learn what she has of English in her besides the name of Frances Evans; she is no novice in the language – that is evident'" (112). Therefore, in accepting William as master of ceremony, Frances's rite of passage not only consists of a progression towards a fixed point in structure, but it also implies a process of "de-gallicization" (Buzard 190) that can culminate in an unmixed cultural identity. That is, William subjects Frances to a rite of cleansing and purification which aims at erasing what he

considers Frances's cultural impurities and in so doing, he constrains and silences the "distinctive female 'I'" behind Frances's story (Abel et al. 10).

> The young Anglo-Swiss evidently derived both pleasure and profit from the study of her Mother-tongue; in teaching her I did not of course confine myself to the ordinary school-routine; I made instruction in English a channel for instruction in literature. I prescribed to her a course of reading. (122)

Frances's submission to William's "instruction", her passivity in taking a path traced for her by others, sets her apart from Jane Eyre, Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton, Helen Graham, and Shirley Keeldar, and shows a female character more like Agnes Grey, Caroline Helstone, and Lucy Snowe. Although Frances's rite of passage is eventually successful, she has nonetheless renounced the potentiality that the liminal stage offers and which is shown to enable other Brontë heroines to challenge the status quo and become re-assimilated on their own terms. In fact, the non-rejection of her master of ceremony leads Frances to overcome liminality more easily and as such it sets her story of maturation somewhere in between the traditional, linear *Bildungsroman*, where the protagonist is shaped from without, and the female story of development which shows a heroine who "has trouble with mentors" (Fraiman 1).

Frances's rite of passage challenges the patterns observed in both male and female stories of development. While the character is shown to be constrained by the limits imposed by gender, Frances's progress is nonetheless similar to William's though "more conflicted" (Abel et al. 11), and her "rise to happy maturity" does not necessarily come across as a "history of obstruction, imposition, and loss" (Fraiman 10), at least not in the same terms as Jane Eyre's, Lucy Snowe's, or Helen Graham's. What the novel does come close to, however, is the model of female development

where the heroine's "mentor is the man who schools her in order to wed her […] when the mentor is a husband and when apprenticeship reduces to a process of marital binding, it never leads the heroine to mastery but only to a lifetime as perennial novice" (Fraiman 6). In fact, this pattern is present in most of the Brontës' novels albeit with variations.

Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Hesltone also end up marrying their "mentors". [14] However, notwithstanding the identical happy closure for both protagonists, *Shirley* offers the opportunity of analysing two different patterns in female stories of maturation and the implications of gender in rites of passage. Although both characters are female, Shirley is shown to profit from a range of male characteristics while Caroline's is a story of development focused on her coming-out and along the lines of the "novel of awakening". *Shirley* is thus an example of "*plural formations*" (Fraiman 12) in female stories of development and shows how neophytes are not 'homogeneous' (Turner *Ritual Process* 95, 106).

In fact, far from being deprived of all personal and individualistic traits, Shirley Keeldar's mixed attributes as rich landowner, marriageable girl, and orphan place her precisely in-between the public and the private spheres.

> [S]he had no Christian name but Shirley: her parents, who had wished to have a son, finding that, after eight years of marriage, Providence had granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy, if with a boy they had been blessed. (191)

Shirley's first rite of incorporation into social structure, the rite of christening, places her in a limbo "between and betwixt" genders providing her with a split identity. In

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[14] While Louis Moore used to be literally Shirley's private tutor, Robert Moore is the person who provokes Caroline's awakening to sexuality.

this respect, Shirley's is an especially interesting case for, while she attains a fixed point in society, she presents herself as having both a public and a private viewpoint on moral questions:

> 'Caroline, I wish to tell you that I have a great weight on my mind: my conscience is quite uneasy, as if I had committed, or was going to commit, a crime. It is not my *private* conscience, you must understand, but my landed-proprietor and lord-of-the-manor conscience'. (250)

Shirley thus acknowledges an in-between position that causes a split in her identity, which makes the character develop two different consciences, each belonging to a different sphere: private and public.

The Brontës' novels follow the Victorian trend of building developmental narratives around orphaned protagonists, however, Shirley's in-betweenness is not triggered by her being an orphan because, in her case, being parentless does not imply destitution – quite the opposite of what happens with most orphaned heroines. Nonetheless, it is not clear to what extent we can deem Shirley's initial rite of incorporation into society as successful or failed. While *Wuthering Heights* also shows how the 'wrong' name is given to the 'wrong' person, with Heathcliff being christened after the Earnshaws' dead first-born, it is clear that the collapse of differences triggered by that ritual forces its failure so that Heathcliff's incorporation into the family, and therefore society, is never completed, as I discuss in Chapter 1. However, in Shirley's case, because she retains her position in the upper classes, her split identity is shown to be empowering.

> 'Business! Really the word makes me conscious I am indeed no longer a girl, but quite a woman and something more. I am an esquire: Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man's name; I hold a man's position:

it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood; and when I see such people […]

gravely talking to me of business, really I feel quite gentlemanlike'. (193, 194)

Shirley's masculine traits give her access to the public, male sphere and she is depicted as ready to make the most of this possibility. Thus, if "Shirley Keeldar is standing on the other side of what […] has come to look like an unbridgeable gulf between female retirement and male activity" (Freeman "Unity and Diversity in *Shirley*" 570, 571) it is because the heroine's ultimate role is, I argue, to bridge the divide between spheres. This way, through the character of Shirley, Charlotte Brontë proposes a model of independent, self-sufficient femininity, similar to the fin-de-siècle New Woman, which adds to the proto-feminist quality of the novel in a similar way to the effect Anne Brontë achieves in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which I discuss in Chapter 3. While the "multiplicity of conflicting public and private identities" has been seen as making Shirley's liminal state "both empowering and oppressive" (Gargano 786), it can be argued that the heroine embodies the positive aspect of the potentiality offered by the liminal stage. Hers is an attitude completely different to Frances Henri's, and for that reason, Shirley manages to develop on her own terms, quite the opposite to what the generic *Bildungsroman* asks of its protagonists.

While most of the Brontës' heroines are shown to complain about the narrowness of space and the scarcity of options that being a woman implies, and in *Shirley* it is Caroline Helstone who mainly plays that part, Shirley Keeldar manages to escape most of those constraints thanks to her dual identity. Throughout the novel Shirley is shown to bridge the divide between spheres by altering the quasi-sacred gendering of spaces that regulated who belonged where within the Victorian

household.[15] As true mistress of her house and estate, Shirley is shown to make the spaces she inhabits fluid, at certain times attuned to female habits and at other times public and male.

> She keeps her dark old manor-house light and bright with her cheery presence: the gallery, and the low-ceiled chambers that open into it, have learned lively echoes from her voice: the dim entrance hall, with its one window, has grown pleasantly accustomed to the frequent rustle of a silk dress, as its wearer sweeps across from room to room, now carrying flowers to the barbarous peach-bloom salon, now entering the dining-room to open its casements and let in the scent of mignonette and sweetbriar, anon bringing plants from the staircase-window to place in the sun at the open porch-door. (364)

Shirley, "quite a woman and something more" (194), exercises control over space thanks to the freedom that her dual identity grants, quite the opposite to Helen Graham's case. Owing to her in-between identity, the heroine is shown to feel at ease in any context: "'The counting-house is better than my bloom-coloured drawing-room: I adore the counting-house'" (195). Not only that, but she also influences and alters the domestic space depending on the task at hand. Therefore, in the same way as she is depicted taking care of flowers, light, and airing, she is also shown to lead business at her "dark old-manor house":

> 'Well – you are neither my wife nor my daughter, so I'll be led for once; but mind – I know I *am* led: your little female manoevres [sic] don't blind me.'
> 'Oh!' said Shirley [...] 'you must regard me as Captain Keeldar to-day. This is quite a gentleman's affair – yours and mine entirely, Doctor (so she had dubbed the

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[15] See for instance Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* and Davidoff and Hall.

Rector). The ladies there are only to be our aids-de-camp, and at their peril they speak, till we have settled the whole business'. (258)

By making use of her male persona, Shirley feels entitled to treat men as her equals. Moreover, her dual identity is shown to allow her to take liberties unthinkable to many other women. In fact, one scene sees Shirley, "who could not be inhospitable" (267), acting the part of hostess to the curates of the parish to settle down a philanthropic project to relieve the poor – a common female practice in Victorian times – and turning one of them out of her house:

'There, – you have reached the climax,' said Shirley, quietly. 'You have reached the climax,' she repeated, turning her glowing glance towards him. 'You cannot go beyond it, and,' she added with emphasis, 'you *shall* not, in my house.'

Up she rose: nobody could control her now, for she was exasperated; straight she walked to her garden-gates, wide she flung them open.

'Walk through,' she said austerely, 'and pretty quickly, and set foot on this pavement no more.' […] 'Rid me of you instantly – instantly!' reiterated Shirley, as he lingered.

'Madam – a clergyman! Turn out a clergyman?'. (273)

This passage not only portrays an empowered woman who rules over and protects her territory as men usually do in their role as paterfamilias, it also offers a secularised re-writing of the Expulsion of Eden by giving Shirley authority to expel a member of the Church from her house.

Nonetheless, in spite of the freedom that her dual identity and her status allow, Shirley is not completely free from the submission expected from neophytes. Her uncle and guardian, who "anxiously desired to have his niece married; to make for her a suitable match; give her in charge to a proper husband, and wash his hands

of her for ever" (439), takes on the role of master of ceremonies. It is at this point that we can see Shirley play the part of what I term a rebellious neophyte by rejecting her master of ceremonies' impositions:

> 'What shadow of power have you over me? Why should I fear you?'
>
> 'Take care, madam!'
>
> 'Scrupulous care I will take, Mr Sympson. Before I marry, I am resolved to esteem – to admire – to *love*.'
>
> 'Preposterous stuff! – indecorous! – unwomanly!'
>
> 'To love with my whole heart. I know I speak in an unknown tongue; but I feel indifferent whether I am comprehended or not'. (441)

Like Jane Eyre's questioning of Rochester's and St John Rivers' authority over her, Shirley openly defies her uncle on the same point, enacting a rebellion that seeks to inscribe and formulate female development in ways the generic *Bildungsroman* would deem "unorthodox" and unconventional (Fraiman x; Abel et al. 10, 11). Shirley's resistance against the normative middle-class ideology of female submissiveness – represented by Mr Sympson and his considerations about marriage – extends throughout the novel. However, while for other Brontë heroines these acts of insurrection against masters of ceremonies usually place them in the position of scapegoats because they are perceived as a threat to social order and its system of cultural distinctions, in Shirley's case rebellion does not imply extended liminality. Because Shirley is shown to make the most of her in-between identity while managing to retain an independent status, hers is a rite of passage that escapes the dangers of becoming "stuck" in liminality which may lead to a state of suspended transition, and to the experience of a liminal hotspot.

Caroline Helstone, traditionally read as Shirley's alter ego, shares some of the protagonists' traits: she is also in the position of an orphan under her uncle's care. Nonetheless, her story of development turns around the moment of coming-out and the search for love, and is narrated along the lines of the "novel of awakening" in as much as Caroline's progression is marked by the realization of the limits and constraints imposed by gender (Rosowski 49).

"Caroline Helstone was just eighteen years old; and at eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to be commenced" (95). Although Shirley is just about the same age, the differences in disposition between both characters are noticeable. Caroline's options are those available to the traditional Victorian heroine in reduced circumstances and her passive attitude, similar to Frances Henri's or Lucy Snowe's, prevents an expansion of horizons. Whereas other heroines like Jane Eyre are shown to reject their masters of ceremonies with the aim of achieving true happiness, even if that cancels the immediate possibility of surmounting liminality, Caroline submits and leaves to others the fashioning of her life.

I read Caroline's position as an example of affective liminality. Her role in social structure is defined by her being Reverend Helstone's niece but nonetheless she is shown to feel destitute:

> [The Rector] was not, as we are aware, much adapted either by nature or habits, to have the charge of a young girl: he had taken little trouble about her education; probably, he would have taken none if [Caroline], finding herself neglected, had not grown anxious of her own account, and asked, every now and then, for a little attention, and for the means of acquiring such knowledge as could not be dispensed with. Still, she had a depressing feeling that she was inferior. (74)

Caroline's development has been marked by her master of ceremonies, her uncle, and in accepting him, she has narrowed her possibilities. Hers is a situation similar to Frances Henri's, who complains she has "done but little, learnt but little, and seen but little" (*The Professor* 120).

Actually, Caroline's progression, her awakening, is barely perceptible to the eye. The character's longings are usually kept private and she fails to find the means to act them out, much as Lucy Snowe.

> At last the life she led reached the point when it seemed she could bear it no longer; that she must seek and find a change somehow, or her heart and head would fail under the pressure which strained them. She longed to leave Briarfield, to go to some very distant place. She longed for something else: the deep, secret, anxious yearning to discover and know her mother strengthened daily […] But one project could she frame whose execution seemed likely to bring her a hope of relief; it was to take a situation, to be a governess – she could do nothing else. (180)

The constant longings for changes of scene that the Brontës' characters are shown to express demonstrate the importance of territorial passages and how they can be understood to answer the need for regeneration (Van Gennep 182). Nonetheless, Caroline Helstone is the only character in the novels who fails to execute this expansion of horizons, a fact which depicts her as the "essentially passive" character common to novels of awakening (Rosowski 50). In fact, even the characters of Lucy Snowe and Agnes Grey – marked by their passivity – manage this change of scene and end up taking a situation. The main difference however is that, while Lucy Snowe has no one to deter her, and Agnes Grey manages to talk her parents into it, Caroline Helstone accepts her uncle's refusal – he "will not have it said that [his] niece is a governess" (184).

Once Caroline fully realises the limits of her existence, the novel heads towards the type of plot where "[f]aced with the break between psychological needs and social imperatives, literary convention finds only one possible solution: the heroine's death" (Hirsch 27). Unable to start a revolution that may leave her socially destitute but would allow for the possible benefits of potentiality, Caroline begins to decline (185) and her story adopts a "discontinuous, circular path" made of "structures of repetition" (Hirsch 26) which achieves a happy ending just by mere chance and without eventually showing a fully mature heroine.

Similarly, *Agnes Grey* tells the story of a heroine whose successful process of maturation has been questioned by critics.[16] Although Anne Brontë depicts the character's full rite of passage, as she also does in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the author's commitment to domestic realism prevents the depiction of Agnes's experience of the liminal hotspot and only provides hints of the character's liminal stage.

> All true stories contain instruction […] Whether this be the case with my history or not, I am hardly competent to judge; I sometimes think it might prove useful to some, and entertaining to others, but the world may judge for itself: shielded by my own obscurity, and by the lapse of years, and a few fictitious names, I do not fear to venture, and will candidly lay before the public what I would not disclose to the most intimate friend. (61)

With this statement, the narrator makes clear her intentions about writing a story which may instruct others and introduces *Agnes Grey* as a fictional autobiography which is reminiscent of Charlotte's Preface to *The Professor*, and William Crimsworth's account of the reasons to tell his story. Unlike *Jane Eyre* however,

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[16] See Baldridge.

also presented to the public as a fictional autobiography, Anne's narrator's commitment to a story "carefully copied from the life" (A. Brontë "Preface" 4), narrows down the possibility of 'experimenting' with ways of telling that depart from realism. In fact, contemporary reviewers of *Agnes Grey* commended the author's minuteness and delineations from life.[17] Moreover, as an educational novel (Frawley 83), *Agnes Grey* is interested in exposing the hardships of a governess who has to cope with the moral wrongs of her social betters.

Nonetheless, as a novel concerned with depicting the everyday of a governess in a truthful way, *Agnes Grey* places at the centre depictions of liminality: one of the aspects characteristic of the position of the Victorian governess. However, in spite of the well-known ambiguous, dual nature of the figure of the governess, Agnes is portrayed as experiencing the potentiality proper to the liminal stage from the moment she decides she wants to get a position:

> How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance, and something to comfort and help my father, mother, and sister, besides exonerating them from the provision of my food and clothing […] And then, how charming to be intrusted with the care and education of children! (69)

The heroine dreams of expanding her horizons and making use of her faculties through labour as William Crimsworth, Jane Eyre, and Caroline Helstone are also shown to do. The positive aspect of the potentiality offered by liminality is reinforced through Agnes's account of her territorial passage:

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[17] See Allott 227, 258-259.

the morning brought a renewal of hope and spirits […] I rose, washed, dressed, swallowed a hasty breakfast, received the fond embraces of my father, mother, and sister, kissed the cat […] mounted the gig, drew my veil over my face, and then, but not till then, burst into a flood of tears […] As we drove along, my spirits revived again, and I turned with pleasure, to the contemplation of the new life upon which I was entering. (71, 73)

Agnes's passage marks the rite of separation from her previous point in structure and is perceived by the character as a moment of "death and rebirth" (Van Gennep 182). Nonetheless, the "emotional overheat" (Szakolczai "Permanent (Trickster) Liminality" 231) proper to threshold stages is also present in this new phase, and in fact, it is the emotional plane that will be more affected by the heroine's experience of liminality.

Not being destitute as most of the other Brontës' protagonists, Agnes's liminal stage is different because she has a home to return to. Unlike Lucy Snowe, for example, there is a clear way out of liminality for Agnes even if she does not have an adequate master of ceremonies: she has the power to put an end to this in-between stage. This fact, I suggest, places the protagonist in a privileged position when compared to other Brontëan neophytes and precludes an analysis of Agnes's liminality as a state characterised by "uncertainty" and "ambivalence" (Stenner et al. 142) since although not sure about the outcome of this threshold stage, the possibility of enacting a "home-coming" remains available throughout. Thus, the "dispossession and subsequent search for a home [which] develops the tropes of liminality, exile and final recognition" (Reynolds and Humble 123) proper to the destitute governess's story are subdued in *Agnes Grey*.

Nonetheless, the heroine's position as governess implies being in-between: "I can conceive few situations more harassing than that wherein, however you may long for success, however you may labour to fulfil your duty, your efforts are baffled and set at naught by those beneath you, and unjustly censured and misjudged by those above" (93). Indeed, Agnes Grey is shown as advancing Jane Eyre's being rejected "from below as well as from above" (Politi 57). As Anne's protagonist states, "[t]he servants, seeing in what little estimation the governess was held by both parents and children, regulated their behaviour by the same standard" (128).

The in-betweenness proper to the figure of the governess is due to the system of differences it threatens to destroy. First, the governess represented a bridge between the public and the private spheres since she was an employee at the heart of the home:

> [t]he employment of a gentlewoman as a governess in a middle-class family served to reinforce and perpetuate certain Victorian values. But inherent in the employment of a lady was a contradiction of the very values she was hired to fulfill. The result was a situation of conflict and incongruity both for the governess and the family. (Peterson 4, 5)

Secondly, she was also a bridge between classes: she was, ideally, a woman of gentle birth in reduced circumstances with the accomplishments of a middle-class lady but got paid as any working-class woman would. Thus, the governess "lives at that ambiguous point in the social structure at which two worlds […] meet and collide" (Eagleton 16).

It is thus that Agnes's experience of liminality derives from the social in-betweenness of the governess but is shown to affect her emotionally rather than socially. In fact, as she goes on to experience the well-known hardships inherent in

"the governess's yoke" (142), her affective liminality is further highlighted and becomes more elaborated.

> It was with a strange feeling of desolation, mingled with a strong sense of the novelty of my situation, and a joyless kind of curiosity concerning what was yet unknown, that I awoke the next morning feeling like one whirled away by enchantment, and suddenly dropped from the clouds into a remote and unknown land, widely and completely isolated from all he had ever seen or known before; or like a thistle-seed borne on the wind to some strange nook of uncongenial soil. (117)

Upon getting a second position as governess, the potentiality that Agnes had experienced before is now dual: it is not just about "novelty" anymore, now there is also "desolation". Actually, the fact that the heroine needs to resort to metaphors to better convey her feeling of uprootedness and alienation shows how the more elaborated the liminal experience, the more complex the narrative techniques that need to be used to depict it.

Agnes's articulation of her affective dislocation advances how some of Charlotte Brontë's characters will express themselves when experiencing moments of emotional uprootedness marked by "the lonely drudgery of [their] present life" (154):

> I *was* lonely – never, from month to month, from year to year, except during my brief intervals of rest at home, did I see one creature to whom I could open my heart, or freely speak my thoughts with any hope of sympathy, or even comprehension; never one […] with whom I could enjoy a single moment of social intercourse, whose conversation was calculated to render me better, wiser, or happier than before. (154)

Agnes's sorrows relate to the isolation of the governess at the household, and represent an experience of liminality similar to Jane Eyre's or Lucy Snowe's. Unlike the other heroines, however, Agnes's threshold stage is also marked by homesickness.

But if there is something that makes Agnes Grey's rite of passage especially different from other Brontëan characters, however, it is not the fact that she has a home to return to, but that she is afraid of being assimilated:

> to be restricted to such associates was a serious evil, both in its immediate effects and the consequences that were likely to ensue […] Habitual associations are known to exercise a great influence over each other's minds and manners. Those whose actions are for ever before our eyes, whose words are ever in our ears, will naturally lead us, albeit against our will – slowly – gradually – imperceptibly, perhaps to act and speak as they do. I will not presume to say how far this irresistible power of assimilation extends […] And I, as I could not make my young companions better, feared exceedingly that they would make me worse. (155)

While many of the Brontë's protagonists are shown to reject their self-appointed inadequate masters and mistresses of ceremonies, none is shown to fear assimilation. The closest example is to be found in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, where Anne Brontë again focuses on representations of moral depravity among the upper classes. However, although Helen Huntingdon regrets her assimilation in her role as wife, she only fears for her son.[18] Agnes Grey, however, reverses the notions about the polluting condition of liminal entities and displaces that trait onto the representatives of the status quo.

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[18] See Chapter 3 for an analysis.

Nonetheless, in spite of her exposure to noxious morals, Agnes does not alter. Her reassimilation takes place once she enacts a "return to origins", that is, to the mother. However, it is not clear that the protagonist has matured, and in fact, much like Caroline Helstone, her happy ending is not promoted by her defiance of normative structure or ideology, as is the case with Helen Graham or Jane Eyre. Rather, Agnes Grey's fulfilment reads as a reward for having been the "pliant" and "tempered" protagonist which Moretti considers essential to the traditional *Bildung* (*Way* 31) even if hers is a "narrative of complaint" (Howgate 218). However, as a heroine who according to some critics starts off already deserving a happy ending and whose "goal in life is to develop emotionally until she is ready for marriage" (Peer 16), Agnes Grey's success in achieving maturity is arguably as modest as her success as a governess.

The Professor, *Shirley*, and *Agnes Grey* narrate five different stories of development, all of which can be analysed through the lens of theories about liminality. Nonetheless, in these novels there are no detailed representations of instances of suspended transitions and no character can be consistently analysed as experiencing a liminal hotspot due to, I argue, the realist conventions that these novels follow. *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *Villette*, on the other hand, show the Brontës' interest in the complexity of in-between states and how these are represented to allow for freedom and independence. The following chapters analyse these novels from the perspective of theories about liminality while also accounting for their stylistic peculiarities, exploring how the Brontës challenge not only the generic *Bildungsroman* but also nineteenth-century realist conventions.

In Chapter 1 I explore the process of undifferentiation triggered at Wuthering Heights by Heathcliff's failed initiation and his subsequent liminal state. This approach allows for an understanding of Heathcliff as victim and scapegoat and accounts for the escalation of crisis and violence that the novel portrays as the result of his suspended transition. This way, I argue that *Wuthering Heights* focuses on a story of male suspended development in Gothic key which completely departs from the model observed by the generic *Bildungsroman*, thus showing how gender is not the only marker to be taken into account in discussing the shortcomings of theoretical formulations of the genre. Emily Brontë's novel also shows how Heathcliff's experience of the liminal hotspot affects space and time and extends to all the inhabitants at the Heights, making "antistructure" the 'new normal' and dragging every other character into a state of in-betweenness which shows the dangers of extended liminality. Moreover, in his attempt to put an end to his state of suspension and become incorporated on his own terms, Heathcliff is shown to make the most of the potentiality afforded by the liminal stage in an exercise of radical empowerment and to disregard all traditional Victorian rites of passage, instead of which, he recurs to secular rituals that eventually prove to leave both him and Catherine Earnshaw in an ever-lasting liminal state which to them is nonetheless liberating.

Chapter 2 analyses Jane Eyre's suspended transition as due to her constant rejection of what the character is shown to consider inadequate masters and mistresses of ceremonies. This dual position as rejector and rejected suspends the heroine in a state of in-betweenness which stretches for most of the novel, thus showing Charlotte Brontë's interest in threshold experiences. Jane Eyre's position as rebellious neophyte is key to the proto-feminist tone of the novel in as much as it

shows a female character who refuses to accept the limitations imposed by gender that the representatives of the status quo endorse. For this reason, Jane is displaced to the role of scapegoat at several instances in the novel. Moreover, my approach to Jane and Rochester's relationship follows the dynamics of "spontaneous communitas" (Turner *Ritual Process* 132) and shows how the balance in power that can be observed between both characters is due to the fact that Rochester is also undergoing his own rite of passage. My discussion of Jane Eyre's assimilation into society challenges traditional readings of the novel by displacing the importance of the rite of marriage between Jane and Rochester.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, which I discuss in Chapter 3, offers the possibility of analysing the three stages in the heroine's rite of passage and the three identities that each stage forces upon her. While Helen Lawrence starts as a character with a fixed point in society, we can see how upon becoming Helen Huntingdon she becomes immersed in a liminal position in between the roles of mother and wife that makes her transition suspended. Unable to cope with the process of undifferentiation that develops at Grassdale Manor and aware of the uselessness of her womanly influence, she is shown to reduplicate her liminal stage when she decides to become Helen Graham. With this step, Anne Brontë manages to depict the dual nature of the potentiality afforded by the liminal stage: Helen is freed from the submission and humiliation of her marriage but becomes an outcast and a symbolic scapegoat due to her inability to be properly assimilated into the community she approaches. Another rebellious neophyte, the character of Helen Graham is key to propose new, more liberating models of womanhood which nonetheless cannot escape the experience of the liminal hotspot.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I explore the seemingly never-ending liminal hotspot that Lucy Snowe is shown to experience in *Villette*. The proto-modernist style of the novel gives a special emphasis to the psychological dimension of the character. Thanks to this, Lucy Snowe is a character who evidences the importance of the emotional aspect of the experience of the liminal hotspot. Lucy's constant feeling of uprootedness is what, I claim, leaves the character suspended in liminality even after she manages to acquire a fixed point in the social structure. By far the most passive of the Brontës' heroines, Lucy Snowe's trajectory goes from stages of total paralysis to instances where she manages to come up with "pattern shifts" that may enable her to overcome liminality (Greco and Stenner 155). The many instances in the novel where Lucy Snowe's psyche is depicted as incapable of gathering the strength to set her own terms foreshadow a character who is doomed to permanently inhabit the troubled waters of emotional liminality.

Analysing the Brontës' novels through anthropological theories about rites of passage and the recent concept of the "liminal hotspot", this dissertation challenges traditional readings of the texts to argue that in departing from the classical *Bildungsroman* and realist conventions, what the Brontës place at the centre of their narratives are stories of suspended transitions.[19] Exploring the ways in which the protagonists in these novels reject and are rejected shows the authors' fascination with threshold stages which grant the possibility of contesting normative social regulations. The novels show how this 'deviance' may result in extended liminal stages but ultimately proves to be key for the formulation of new models of femininity and masculinity.

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[19] In her discussion of *Jane Eyre*, Penny Boumelha argues that Charlotte Brontë places "the expression of desire as want or need" at the centre (20).

CHAPTER 1

"[A] situation so completely removed from the stir of society": failed initiations and undifferentiated space in *Wuthering Heights*

Lockwood's first impression of Wuthering Heights and its surroundings (3) is self-congratulatory since he was precisely looking for "[a] perfect misanthropist's Heaven" (3). Indeed, the character will have the occasion to see and narrate to what extent Wuthering Heights truly is a place of "antistructure" away from all social order (Turner *Ritual Process* 94, 95). Reading *Wuthering Heights* (1847) from the perspective of theories about liminality and the concept of the liminal hotspot shows how Emily Brontë's novel focuses on stories of suspended transitions: experiences of development which take place within the liminal stage and problematize the possibility of returning to social order. These troubled becomings involve characters and settings alike showing how during the occasion of a liminal hotspot, the dimensions of time, space, and identity may become condensed affecting each other, and might turn chaos into the 'new normal' (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 16-18; Georgsen and Thomassen 199).

The fact that *Wuthering Heights* highlights the main setting of the novel both in the title and the opening sentences stresses the importance of space in this narrative. The Heights is shown throughout the novel to be subjectivised, a characteristic of the Gothic. Moreover, the relevance of the setting also evidences the importance of the spatial dimension in liminality (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 11) and the fact that "*without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply impossible*" [emphasis in the original] (Moretti *Atlas* 100). My analysis of *Wuthering Heights* shows that stories about suspended transitions gain force from a setting that reflects the uncertainty and ambiguity of a liminal hotspot (Stenner et al.

141, 142), and the fact that in liminality everything "trembles in the balance" (Turner *Ritual to Theatre* 44). Furthermore, what the narrative process seems to suggest is that, just as liminal hotspots refer to suspended transitions and cannot be self-contained, so does narrating these experiences ask for a fluid, in-between style. My reading of the novel shows how Brontë's displacement of the domestic in favour of the Gothic, only to come back to domestic realism again challenges Victorian notions of idealised femininity and masculinity, and dismisses generic stories of development arguably assuming that they cannot afford harmony between the self and society (Dilthey 336; Lukács 132). Together with the importance of space, the layered narrative and its disrupted chronology demonstrate the interaction between the dimensions of liminality identified by Thomassen showing how they interact and reflect one another to create a liminal hotspot. For these reasons, as a novel about threshold individuals, *Wuthering Heights* sits in between a multitude of genres and ways of telling.

This chapter explores how Heathcliff's failed rite of incorporation into the Earnshaws' home triggers a process of undifferentiation that affects the whole household for two generations. Perceived as a threat to the status quo and relegated to the position of scapegoat, Heathcliff becomes "stuck" in liminality (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22) and his transition into structure becomes suspended. Nonetheless, by making use of the potentiality afforded by this threshold stage, the character is shown to try and overcome liminality on his own terms, thanks to the radical empowerment that rebellious neophytes seem to benefit from, a fact which forces an escalation of crisis and violence. Heathcliff's experience of the liminal hotspot and his efforts to become assimilated ignoring traditional rites of passage cause a collapse of spheres and traditional social and domestic codes due to the

absence of "a regulated system of distinctions" (Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 49). Similarly, Heathcliff's suspended transition also challenges generic stories of male development since his transformation into a "gentleman" (Brontë 5) is never narrated.

The process of undifferentiation that Girard understands as the main cause for social crisis (*Violence and the Sacred* 49) has been completed by the time we enter the Heights for the first time: Heathcliff is "landlord" (3) and "gentleman" (5), and Hareton, the rightful heir of Wuthering Heights, shows no "clear proofs of his condition" (12). It is 1801, we are told, and the escalation of violence that can result out of uncontrolled crises (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 102) has already reached its peak: antistructure has been established as the 'new normal'.

Lockwood, in his role of narrator-as-transcriber of Nelly's account and eyewitness of the last stages of the story, has traditionally been studied with a focus on his position as representative of metropolitan middle-class masculinity, and his failure to come to terms with the Heights and its inhabitants. Lockwood's misunderstanding, however, is not only derived from his position as outsider: *Wuthering Heights* tells a story that challenges the reader and resists straight-forward categorizations. As a member of structure, Lockwood cannot make sense of the chaos that may arise from the "institutionalization of liminality" (Turner *Ritual Process* 107; Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22) and not being familiar with the different crises that have taken place throughout the years subsequently described in the novel, the Heights comes across as an illegible space. At this point in time, Wuthering Heights has become a place that exhibits the "sustained uncertainty, ambivalence, and [increasing] tension" that for some theorists constitutes the liminal

hotspot (Stenner et al. 141, 142), a space where social status is as confusing as it is fluid, or, perhaps, confusing precisely because of its fluidity.

> Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door, above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins, and shameless little boys, I detected the date '1500,' and the name 'Hareton Earnshaw'. (4)

Lockwood pauses at the threshold, a position that resembles Van Gennep's account of the liminar poised on the brink of entry into a new stage of experience. His incorporation into a new world (Van Gennep 20) is slightly deferred by his curiosity and it is only Heathcliff's impatient "attitude at the door" (Brontë 4) that prevents the newcomer from prolonging his inspection from this position on the edge, making Lockwood realise that he must make a "speedy entrance or complete departure" (4). However, the "basic procedure" in rites of incorporation, Van Gennep argues, is always the same and consists of "stop[ping], wait[ing], go[ing] through a transitional period, enter[ing], be[ing] incorporated" (28). In his position as outsider therefore, Lockwood is expected to stop at the threshold, in this case represented by "the principal door", since it marks "the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds" (Van Gennep 20).

The fact that Heathcliff is not shown to respect the "rite of the threshold" (Van Gennep 21) evidences his inefficiency as master of ceremonies: on the one hand, Heathcliff has forced his position as master of the household since he was never the intended heir, on the other hand, he remains out of structure and cannot therefore act as master of ceremonies for someone who does belong to the social order. Moreover, Heathcliff's attitude also relates to the disregard for traditional rites of passage that is prevalent throughout the novel, and which I argue to be one of the

causes for the progressive collapse of differences that has led to a liminal hotspot and has turned the house into a space of antistructure. In *Wuthering Heights* traditional rites of passage are either substituted by individualized rites whose validity is not recognised by the community or, if staged, they turn out to be a failure.

In spite of the truncated "rite of the threshold" that this scene depicts, the decoration – in keeping with the fashion of Tudor architecture – that Lockwood is able to perceive adds to the impossibility of reading the Heights from an outsider's point of view. Lockwood thinks he is able to learn about the new territory he is about to be incorporated into: he assumes that once he crosses that border he will enter a three-hundred-year-old family's estate, the Earnshaws' house. And although according to Lockwood his pause at the threshold is cut short by Heathcliff, the idea of enacting a "complete departure" may be suggested by the "grotesque" decoration Lockwood observes over the door. In *Rites of Passage* Van Gennep describes how decorations or marks on thresholds and boundaries may function as "prohibition[s] against entering a given territory" rather than as simple indicators of a threshold space (16, 17). Thus, the "wilderness of crumbling griffins, and shameless little boys" may be read as a warning, as a means of discouraging outsiders from coming into contact with a world where chaos reigns supreme.

Nonetheless, Lockwood crosses the threshold and through his description of the house we are able to get a first impression of it as a liminal locus where regulated notions of time, space, and identity have been suspended and blurred, almost frozen.[20] These are the three dimensions of liminality that Thomassen identifies and whose study has led to his contention that when these three different dimensions of

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[20] In "Time-Space Compression" Josh Poklad offers a very interesting study of the juxtaposition of time and space in *Wuthering Heights*. However, while my study brings the spatial dimension to the fore, Poklad approaches his through Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope" which implies assuming that time is the dominant principle.

liminality are condensed a liminal hotspot appears (Georgsen and Thomassen 199).

Thomassen's assertion that "the point of departure for any analysis of liminality must be spatial" (*Liminality and the Modern* 11), gives this particular dimension a relevance that explains how an analysis of the configuration and meaning of space at the Heights can account for the different "grotesque" scenes that Lockwood encounters, his inability to make any sense out of them, and the feeling of "stagnation" (28) that he experiences in the house. As the origin of this liminal hotspot we will subsequently find an approximately thirty-year process of undifferentiation triggered by the introduction of Heathcliff into the household that has led to recurrent crises and an escalation of violence which have ultimately done away with the "cultural divisions" that govern structure (Girard *The Scapegoat* 12).[21] What Lockwood is about to encounter then is the debris of what once was a happy and harmonious yeoman's extended household.

> One step brought us into the family sitting-room, without any introductory lobby, or passage: they call it here 'the house' pre-eminently. It includes kitchen and parlor [sic], generally, but I believe at Wuthering Heights the kitchen is forced to retreat altogether into another quarter. (4, 5)

This "family sitting-room" is the central communal space at the Heights, where most of the story develops and thus, a recurrent site for crisis. Lockwood's reference to the absence of any "lobby or passage" that can function as "introductory" space highlights the importance of the threshold.[22] At the Heights, once one passes the door there is no intermediate space and Lockwood immediately finds himself in the

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[21] As Nancy Armstrong states, decoding Heathcliff is key to understand the novel as a "coherent whole" ("Emily Brontë In and Out" 90).

[22] Although Lockwood's narration takes place in 1801, prior to the Victorian period, the novel was published in 1847. The spatial arrangements within the Heights do not conform to traditional domestic conventions from either the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

heart of the house, and therefore, in the place that from the eighteenth century onwards was increasingly considered as reserved for the family and therefore private. The fact that by 1801 a house built in 1500 has not undergone any significant kind of refurbishment or modification that adapts its layout to late eighteenth-century codes of domesticity accounts for the space's inability to function according to contemporary ideas of household arrangements.[23]

Built in 1500 we could expect the Heights to have initially followed the domestic fashions and architectural trends of the sixteenth century, when households were "extended" and included anyone working for the master and paterfamilias, who was accountable for everyone living under his roof.[24] In Tudor times, the hall, which functioned as vestibule, was an especially important space in the house since it worked as lobby, where visitors would be received, and it was for a long time "the place where 'state' and 'service' met in the day-to-day life of the house" (Howard 78), thus working as a real in-between space. The absence of this architectural limen that would facilitate the transition "between the foreign and domestic worlds" at the Heights makes "the house" an ambiguous place where the qualities of private and public are not clearly demarcated and therefore collapse due to the lack of "a regulated system of distinctions". This undifferentiation of space mirrors the blurring

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[23] The presence of glazed windows and panelled rooms may point to the great rebuilding that took place between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the novel does not provide any details. On the other hand, this rebuilding led to the increasing segregation of domestic spaces, a characteristic eminently absent from the Heights (King 120).

[24] Chris King explains how "[t]he conceptualisation of the household and state as microcosm and macrocosm was fundamental to early modern patriarchal and political authority; the position of the adult male as head of his household was the foundation of his masculine identity and the basis on which he acted as a free member of the body politic" (117).

of identities of its inhabitants thus showing how the different dimensions of liminality work together and affect each other.[25]

By using a sixteenth-century building which maintains household and kinship arrangements from that period as the setting for a nineteenth-century novel with a plot chiefly set in the late eighteenth century, this space called "the house" has become both private and public and neither private nor public at the same time, a fact which, as this chapter discusses, also problematizes the notions of kinship and family in the novel. This blurring of differences between historical periods and the socio-economic and cultural codes attached to them shows how the main temporal axes of the novel have become condensed. This temporal undifferentiation is concurrently projected on space, which has become stagnated due to the failed transition between eras as far as domesticity is concerned, thus depriving "the house" of a clear identity. "The house" is therefore shown to have become "stuck" in liminality due to the combined condensation of and interplay between the dimensions of time, space, and identity.

In fact it is hard to describe this domestic space in any terms other than the ambivalent and vague "the house". This difficulty in coming up with a more nuanced term for the room is in line with the spatial indeterminacy that governs some of the episodes taking place at the Heights. Following the characters around the house is not always easy. However, after careful consideration of all the passages in the text describing events that take place in this apartment it is safe to assume that in the absence of a precise reference to a specific room, the action is taking place in "the

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[25] The different buildings which scholars have proposed as inspiration for Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange were built later than 1500. Top Withens was built in the second half of the sixteenth century and Ponden Hall in 1634. Wuthering Heights remains a house in the making for most of the novel. Apart from Lockwood's descriptions at the very beginning of the novel, we do not get a clear sense of the distribution of the chambers on the first floor until Isabella describes them in her letter to Nelly towards the end of Volume I (Brontë 142).

house".[26] Together with the ambiguity that marks this room as a result of its different uses, both its occupiers and the objects to be found in it serve to identify it as part of a liminal hotspot.

> I observed no signs of roasting, boiling, or baking, about the huge fire-place; nor any glitter of copper saucepans and tin cullenders on the walls. One end, indeed, reflected splendidly both light and heat from ranks of immense pewter dishes, interspersed with silver jugs and tankards, towering row after row, in a vast oak dresser, to the very roof. The latter had never been underdrawn […] except where a frame of wood laden with oatcakes, and clusters of legs of beef, mutton and ham, concealed it. (5)

Lockwood's detailed description of "the house" points towards the "co-existence of anarchical and structural factors" (Georgsen and Thomassen 204) understood as the bringing together of structural elements coming from different systems of meaning whose merging results in antistructure or anarchy. This co-existence is characteristic of liminal hotspots and highlights the in-betweenness and "ontological indeterminacy" (Greco and Stenner 152) of "the house", which further emphasises how time, space, and identity have become suspended. According to Lockwood's account, "the house" is historically supposed to include parlour and kitchen; however, at the Heights, it includes none and both at the same time.[27] On the one hand, although Lockwood is right in his earlier supposition that the kitchen must be somewhere else – there is a back-kitchen – "the house" is also the place where meals are served – upon his second visit Lockwood notices "the table, laid for a plentiful

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[26] In one instance, for example, Isabella says: "This morning, when I came down […] Mr Earnshaw was sitting by the fire" (180). The information she gives about the space she comes down to is not enough to differentiate between "the house" and the kitchen. It is only by following the development of the whole scene and her subsequent movements that we can conclude that she is talking about the main apartment.

[27] It is difficult to precise the kind of architecture that Lockwood may have in mind here since Tudor houses would normally have the parlour at one end of the hall and the kitchen would be quite removed from it, in the servants' area (Howard 78).

evening meal" (10) – and tea is made, served, and consumed by all the inhabitants at this point in the story. On the other hand, there is not and has never been a parlour at the Heights. Therefore this space has had to serve the purposes of parlour and drawing room for the different mistresses of the house without ever being restricted to one or other of these uses.[28] As a result, this "large, warm, cheerful apartment" (10) has become a multi-purpose, undifferentiated and ungendered space which meets "the quality of 'both/and' *and* 'neither/nor'" which has been identified "to be a chief characteristic of liminal hotspots" (Kofoed and Stenner 169).

Moreover, although Lockwood cannot observe any signs of cooking taking place in the room, the dresser also functions as pantry, storing both kitchenware and food, thus bridging the divide between "the house" and a kitchen proper. For this reason, Lockwood's description fails to delimit the function of this room. Several domestic spaces that began to be kept separate in the eighteenth century merge in this apartment rendering it undifferentiated from clearly delimited domestic spaces like the dining-room, the parlour, or the master's chamber. At the same time, this lack of differentiation turns "the house" into an in-between space where transition between different epochs has been suspended, thus making it a space trapped in-between domestic codes where the temporal and spatial dimensions of liminality compound its ambiguous status.

Among the many objects stored in the dresser Lockwood recognises "pewter dishes, interspersed with silver jugs and tankards": the Middle Ages interspersed with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Pewter was a common material for kitchenware in Europe from the Middle Ages onwards. In England, "[f]or two

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[28] Once Hindley returns to the Heights as a married man he considers the option of arranging a room for his wife to use as parlour but due to her not deeming it necessary he "[drops] the intention" (Brontë 46). The absence of gendered spaces at the Heights represents an important contrast to other novels of the period where female and male spaces are clearly delimited, as for example in Eliot's *Middlemarch* (see Trotter).

centuries from 1474 pewter was unrivalled as a material for plates, dishes, drinking vessels and similar ware", reaching "its zenith in the late [seventeenth] century" (http://www.pewterers.org.uk). However, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the use of pewter utensils declines in favour of silver-made kitchenware for those who could afford it. This way, the objects in the dresser already bear witness to the in-betweenness of "the house": a suspended transition captured in objects which seem to speak of the troubled becomings of the inhabitants. For two generations the Heights has been undergoing a liminal hotspot – an "occasion of troubled and suspended transformative transition" (Kofoed and Stenner 161) – which has affected individuals, space, and time alike. Due to the interplay between these different dimensions of liminality, Heathcliff's suspended transition – his troubled "*event of becoming*" [emphasis in the original] (Greco and Stenner 148) – and the subsequent escalation of crisis have made the Heights remain stuck in-between eras, as is evidenced by the objects that Lockwood notices in "the house".

As Lockwood goes on with the description of "the house", the room becomes much less like a parlour:

> Above the chimney were sundry villainous old guns, and a couple of horse-pistols, and, by way of ornament, three gaudily painted canisters disposed along its ledge. The floor was of smooth, white stone: the chairs […] primitive structures […] In an arch under the dresser, reposed a huge, liver-coloured bitch pointer surrounded by a swarm of squealing puppies, and other dogs haunted other recesses. (5)

The visibility of arms undeniably conveys the presence of the male head of the household.[29] While eighteenth-century conduct books began to delimit the house as the locus of female power-through-surveillance and to consider the country house as "the site of the ideal household" (Armstrong *Desire and Domestic Fiction* 69), by 1801 one can still find "sundry villainous old guns, and a couple of horse-pistols" in the Heights' main apartment. The presence of arms points towards the in-betweenness of the space – with the food as sign of nourishment and therefore female, and the arms and their undeniable link to violence and, thus, to masculinity – and highlights how gender relations have been prevented from being normalised conforming to contemporary developing norms of domesticity within this space, which further evidences its suspended cultural transition.

This coexistence of objects conventionally branded masculine and feminine further highlights the mixed identity of the room and points at gender conventions that were in place prior to the mid-eighteenth century: before the domestic space was being clearly delimited by gender, and also before rejection of physical violence came to be understood as one of the characteristic traits of manliness (Tosh "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society" 333-335). This gender-related suspended transition between periods brings the three dimensions of liminality together once more: time, space, and identity have been impacted by the stagnation that can result from the liminal stage and which derives from the absence of a "regulated system of distinctions" that helps to delimit those very dimensions, thus showing how "without reintegration liminality is pure danger" (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22). The liminal hotspot affecting the Heights shows how stagnation

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[29] According to Brontë biographers, Patrick Brontë used to keep a loaded pistol always at hand, and whereas it is true that Emily could shoot, and indeed was good at it, and was the sibling left in charge of "defending" the house whenever Patrick was away, in *Wuthering Heights* arms are only used by male characters.

seems to share the "contagious" quality of crisis (Thomassen "Thinking with Liminality" 53) and only leads to more stagnation.

Together with the objects thus far described, Lockwood's lack of references to carpets, drapery, or pieces of furniture such as armchairs or sofas takes this space still further away not only from the late eighteenth-century parlour, but also from the ornamental display proper to early modern times (King 115). In fact, the remarks Lockwood makes about the vastness of the place and everything it contains – "huge fire-place",[30] "immense pewter dishes", "a vast oak dresser" – together with his allusions to the "gaudy" ornaments, the bare floors, and the "primitive structure" of the chairs deprive the place of any sense of homeliness.

Moreover, the presence of "a huge, liver-coloured bitch pointer", which Heathcliff warns is "not kept for a pet" (6), further complicates the functioning of contemporary conceptualizations of gender and domesticity at the Heights. After approximately thirty years of antistructure, any notion of motherhood in the novel has been reduced to the bitch. In keeping with the Victorian literary "orphan-convention" (Reynolds and Humble 24), all the other mothers (and fathers, for that matter) have died, thus being unable to nurse or protect their offspring.[31] Left alone with Lockwood, the pointer "suddenly broke into a fury, and leapt on [his] knees" (7). The bitch may be argued to be replicating her master's fierceness and violence, and his dislike of strangers,[32] while at the same time staging a twisted representation of the Victorian ideal of motherhood, because at this point, she is the only female with some territorial power and authority within the household. In contrast to the

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[30] Every time "the house" or the back-kitchen at the Heights are mentioned, an allusion to the fire soon follows.
[31] Heathcliff is the only living parent but his son has died. In *Wuthering Heights* genealogy is cut short by death: either the parents or the children die.
[32] Heathcliff says to Lockwood: "'A stranger is a stranger, be he rich or poor – it will not suit me to permit any one on the range of the place while I am off guard'" (16).

bitch and her "swarm of squealing puppies", "a heap of dead rabbits" which Lockwood mistakes for "something like cats" (11) is also present in this apartment, marking it as a site of both life and death.

So far Lockwood has only been introduced to the main apartment at the Heights; however, his description of this first visit is enough to show us how contemporary normative "cultural divisions" have been suspended in the temporal-spatial axis, which at the same time brings forward the confusing identity of the place. As regards the inhabitants of the Heights, during this first incursion into foreign territory, Lockwood has only come across Joseph, whom he takes to represent "the whole establishment of domestics" (4), and "an inhabitant of the kitchen" (7) whose identity remains unknown.[33] Interestingly enough, these are the only two people whose status Lockwood correctly identifies. Of course he knows that Heathcliff is the master at the Heights and the owner of the Grange as well, but when it comes to describing his landlord, Lockwood cannot categorise him as readily as he does the servants:

> [Mr Heathcliff] is a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman – *that is*, as much a gentleman as many a country squire: rather slovenly, *perhaps*, yet not looking amiss, with his negligence, because he has an erect and handsome figure – and rather morose – *possibly* some people *might* suspect him of a degree of under-bred pride [my emphases]. (5)

In apparent contrast to the servants, Heathcliff represents a total collapse of differences that makes the character resist a straightforward categorization: half a gypsy, half a gentleman, Lockwood's description makes Heathcliff embody "the

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[33] Lockwood describes this servant as a "lusty dame" (7). Taking into account that Zillah and Nelly are the only female servants at the Heights and that Nelly is at this point in the story working at the Grange, it is plausible to conclude that this "inhabitant of the kitchen" has to be Zillah.

quality of "both/and" *and* "neither/nor" that he was first able to perceive in "the house". Lockwood does not really know what to make of him, hence the multiple words and phrases expressing doubt and seeking clarification. Heathcliff is not only the trigger of the process of undifferentiation that culminates in the liminal hotspot developing at the Heights, as this chapter will show, but, as we can infer from this passage, he is also the result of this process.

In Heathcliff we find how two fundamental systems of meaning for understanding society at the time clash: race and class. As one of the characteristic representatives of "Otherness" in Victorian literature, the figure of the gypsy usually stands for "social marginality, nomadism, alienation, and lawlessness" (Nord 189), some of which are also characteristics of the liminar and the scapegoat. Therefore, the fact that Heathcliff, who starts off as an outcast, manages to acquire a position traditionally reserved for 'purely' British gentlemen poses a paradox which may be perceived to threaten the structure of a social order regulated according to social and racial hierarchy (Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 49). In fact, when Heathcliff is first introduced to the Heights, Hindley is shown to feel this threat, which leads him to mistreat the former to keep him low. However, the fact that the paradox represented by Heathcliff-as-gentleman has 'survived' leads to further suspension in as much as "it confuses and interferes with the flows of experience and activity ordinarily channelled by, and into, the orthodox pattern" (Greco and Stenner 155).

Heathcliff is by no means the only subject whose ambiguous identity is affected by and contributes to the formation of the liminal hotspot. His blurred subjectivity adds to the condensation of dimensions and operates together with time and space. Apart from the servants, no one has a defined status in "the house", showing how suspended transitions are at the core of this novel and affect all the

main characters. The confusion brought on by what I argue to be a state of "permanent liminality" (Szakolczai "Permanent (Trickster) Liminality"),[34] which has affected the three dimensions identified by Thomassen, has also had an impact on Catherine Linton and Hareton Earnshaw.[35]

On the occasion of his second visit at the Heights, Lockwood is again introduced to the "large, warm, cheerful apartment" where he is "pleased to observe the 'missis,' […] whose existence [he] had never previously suspected" (10). Lockwood immediately takes Catherine Linton to be the mistress of the house, and because by this time she has already become Catherine Heathcliff, the misunderstanding goes on for a while: he speaks about "[her] servants", refers to her as "the amiable hostess" (10) and "the presiding genius over [Heathcliff's] home and heart" (13), and tells her she is "the proper person to ask [him]" to tea (11). Through these several allusions, we can see how Lockwood is reading Catherine against the domestic standards that began to spread across England towards the end of the eighteenth century. Lockwood is thus endowing Catherine with the power that women reportedly had over the household: watching over the domestics, attending to guests, and being in charge of the feminine domestic task *par excellence*, that is, tea. As an outsider, Lockwood holds on to the systems of meaning belonging to his metropolitan milieu, the realm of structure and order, still unaware of the process of undifferentiation that has resulted in the liminal hotspot he is witnessing.

However, when Lockwood meets Catherine Linton, she has already been experiencing the liminal hotspot developing at the Heights for some time. Née Linton, she is the offspring of the marriage between Catherine Earnshaw and Edgar

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[34] Árpád Szakolczai develops and expands on the concept of "permanent liminality"; however, the fact that he also provides a way out of this transitional state makes the quality of permanency slightly questionable.
[35] Both Catherines will be referred to using their maiden names.

Linton. By this time in the story she has already married and become the widow of her cousin Linton Heathcliff, son of Heathcliff and Isabella Linton, and she will soon become Catherine Earnshaw through marriage to her other cousin Hareton, son of Hindley Earnshaw and his wife, Frances. Having been endowed with all the available family names within the novel, Catherine Linton embodies not only a collapse of differences between the two antagonistic families but also a blurring of distinctions between consanguineous and affinitive relationships.

This process of undifferentiation at the level of identity also stems from the multiple rites of passage she has undergone at such a young age: birth, coming-out, marriage, widowhood, and re-marriage are condensed in the space of a mere nineteen years.[36] Catherine's multiple names and roles are not only reminiscent of her late mother's multiple selves and inner struggle between a life of beggary and a comfortable existence;[37] they also show how the daughter undoes the mother's transition to misery and madness,[38] which, in the daughter's case, leads to freedom and happiness.[39] In fact, Catherine Linton can be said to inherit her mother's split identity: "[i]t was named Catherine, but [her father] never called it by the name in full, as he had never called the first Catherine short, probably because Heathcliff had

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[36] I read Catherine Linton's eagerness to get out of the Grange's bonds as a coming-out narrated as a voyage out. It is by means of her excursions that she becomes "separat[ed] from the asexual world" and "incorporat[ed] into the world of sexuality" (Van Gennep 67), especially, as critics have noted, in her "pilgrimage" to Penistone Craggs, where she meets Hareton, who "open[s] the mysteries of the Fairy cave, and twenty other queer places" (Brontë 198).

[37] When Catherine Earnshaw tells Nelly about Linton's marriage proposal and her acceptance, she explains that "if Heathcliff and [she] married, [they] should be beggars" (82). In contrast, marrying Linton would make her "the greatest woman of the neighbourhood" (78).

[38] Catherine Earnshaw's mental illness follows the pattern of hysteria as it was understood in the nineteenth century. Both episodes of nervous fever are triggered by Heathcliff, and the second one, from which she never recovers, takes place during her pregnancy. This way, Catherine's mental stability is linked and dependent on her sexuality. See Showalter, *The Female Malady* for an analysis of female mental illness in the nineteenth century.

[39] The first Catherine goes from Earnshaw, to Heathcliff ("I *am* Heathcliff" (82)), to Linton, while the second Catherine goes from Linton, to Heathcliff, to Earnshaw.

a habit of doing so" (184).[40] Whereas Edgar Linton wants to keep his daughter as far away as possible from antistructure and to establish a difference between the child and the mother, Heathcliff goes to still greater lengths to maintain Catherine Earnshaw's memory unpolluted: he only calls Catherine Linton by her name once in the whole novel (271). However, in spite of these characters' efforts to maintain a system of distinctions at such a basic level, Catherine Linton's likeness to her mother in looks and manners enables her to rewrite the parent's story.

This rewriting that Catherine Linton enacts is what propels her multiple rites of passage. However, in spite of all the changes of role she experiences, until Heathcliff dies, what Catherine Linton has ultimately been incorporated into, and by force, is a locus of antistructure where she has no defined status – which further evidences the regular failure of traditional rites of passage in this novel. The different roles that legitimately belong to her and the privileges one could expect from them – mistress of the Heights through marriage to the heir, heiress of the Grange, widow, the master's daughter-in-law – have been rendered ineffectual and merged with those of dependant, hostage, and orphan, thus placing Catherine in a truly in-between position.[41]

This ambiguous identity also positions Catherine Linton as a heroine in-between Victorian patterns: she can be argued to displace the dyadic model opposing the angel in the house to the fallen woman upon which Victorian femininity was constructed by several discourses. First of all, Catherine cannot represent the angel in

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[40] While many critics have paid attention to the fact that upon his arrival at the Heights all the characters refer to Heathcliff as "it" (Brontë 36, 37) and have taken it as proof of his status as outcast, this passage shows how the same treatment applies to Catherine Linton.

[41] Even the servants find it difficult to delimit Catherine's position: "'[a]nd what will all her learning and daintiness do for her, now? She's as poor as you, or I – poorer – I'll be bound – you're saving – and I'm doing my little, all that road'" (295). Indeed, Heathcliff treats her as a dependant: "'you live on my charity! Put your trash away, and find something to do. You shall pay me for the plague of having you eternally in my sight – do you hear, damnable jade?'" (30).

the house because her transition into the Victorian epitome of womanhood – mother, wife, and therefore mistress of the house – has been suspended and disrupted. Moreover, we can see how she refuses to comply with the domestic role of hostess. Also, her short time as married woman only grants her further seclusion in Linton's room while he is on his deathbed, thus further displacing the Victorian ideal of wife as superintendent of her household. However, Catherine Linton is not a fallen woman either. The adult knowledge she may have has been arguably gained from her short period as wife, and the lack of propriety one may observe in her manners can be easily accounted as an example of the "emotional overheat" and subsequent "burnout" that can result from the experience of the liminal hotspot (Szakolczai "Permanent (Trickster) Liminality" 234). Therefore, at the level of characterization, Catherine Linton occupies a space in-between the Angel in the House of the mid-nineteenth century and the fallen woman, which seems to anticipate a model of heroine closer to "the girl of the period" that would emerge in the 1860s with sensation fiction.

Once Hareton enters the apartment "the pleasant family circle" (14) is completed. Hareton Earnshaw represents another enigma that Lockwood also fails to decode since he can find no "clear proofs of his condition" (12):

> The young man had slung onto his person a decidedly shabby upper garment […] I began to doubt whether he were a servant or not; his dress and speech were both rude, entirely devoid of the superiority observable in Mr and Mrs Heathcliff; his thick brown curls were rough and uncultivated, his whiskers encroached bearishly over his cheeks, and his hands were embrowned like those of a common labourer: still his bearing was free, almost haughty, and he showed none of a domestic's assiduity in attending the lady of the house. (11, 12)

Even if still confused about Catherine's and Heathcliff's status, Lockwood can perceive that Hareton should not be grouped with them. Little does he suspect that this "rustic youth" (12) is the legitimate owner of the Heights. As the passage above shows, Lockwood's analysis of Hareton rests on systems of meaning pertaining to social order: appearance and hierarchy. Hareton lacks the "dress and manners [of] a gentleman" that Heathcliff possesses and he is also far removed from the "admirable form, and the most exquisite little face" which accompany Catherine's "neat frock" (11). It is for these reasons, because of Hareton's unconventional looks, that he must belong somewhere else, although Lockwood cannot say exactly where.

While Hareton stands in opposition to Heathcliff and Catherine as regards appearance, he equally represents a contrast to Joseph, whom Lockwood has seen obeying orders. In this sense Lockwood's attempt to read Hareton is reminiscent of Charlotte Brontë's depiction of the first encounter between Jane and Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, where Rochester is shown to be at a loss to discern Jane's status.[42] In Hareton's case, his blurred identity and position are derived from the process of degradation to which he has been subjected by Heathcliff. However, in contrast to most characters in the book, Hareton "takes a pride in his brutishness" (219), that is, he has undergone "[t]he ordeals and humiliations […] to which neophytes are submitted" without complaint (Turner *Ritual Process* 103).[43] Nonetheless, although taking part in a rite of passage which has effectively separated him from his previous status – as Nelly explains "[t]he unfortunate lad is the only one, in all this parish, that does not guess how he has been cheated" (35) – Hareton's transition has been

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[42] "'You are not a servant at the Hall, of course. You are –' He stopped, ran his eye over my dress, which as usual, was quite simple […] He seemed puzzled to decide what I was" (C. Brontë *Jane Eyre* 116).

[43] The other characters who have found themselves degraded at the Heights – Heathcliff, Isabella, and Catherine Linton – demonstrate against the treatment they receive.

suspended because, as Lockwood's description attests, he has not achieved any newly defined status in society; rather, he has been kept "stuck in liminality".

Read comparatively, the characters of Catherine and Hareton represent two contrasting approaches to nineteenth-century literary representations of orphanhood and development. In fact, Hareton's subservient and respectful attitude towards Heathcliff remains to this day one of the biggest puzzles in *Wuthering Heights* – and one which has not received much critical attention. While Catherine is shown to replicate the attitude of other Victorian fictional orphans towards their abusers, and she openly defies her captor and tries to break free even risking her physical integrity,[44] Hareton is shown to be perfectly content in his position as long as he is let alone (110). In this sense, Hareton's submissive attitude makes him the perfect initiand, but also the exception to the rule in the Brontës' novels.

Whereas Van Gennep, Turner, Girard, Thomassen, and others have not considered the possibility of neophytes rebelling against their masters in the social formations they analyse, whether the latter are legitimate or not – thus proposing the liminar (scapegoats included) as a figure that adheres to a universal Christ-like pattern – literature shows that resistance and power struggles often take place. The absence of instances of insurrection in rites of passage as recorded by such anthropologists, ethnographers, and social scientists may be due to the fact that, as Giles argues, the liminal stage provides a privileged point of view for the neophyte in that it allows them to look backwards and forwards (33), because in rites carried out under controlled circumstances and the guidance of appropriate masters, one is to

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[44] There is a stark contrast between the treatment Heathcliff dispenses to Catherine Linton and Hareton. While he has brought Hareton as low as possible by omission ("[Heathcliff] appeared to have bent his malevolence on making [Hareton] a brute: he was never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit which did not annoy his keeper; never led a single step towards virtue, or guarded by a single precept against vice" (197)), he is shown to use physical violence against Catherine (see for example Brontë 30, 271).

some extent sure about the outcome. However, Giles's argument does not work when applied to industrialised societies, where liminality can become suspended because transitions can become troubled, which is exactly the case with the social world depicted in *Wuthering Heights*.[45] In fact, these characters' troubled becomings can be read as the result of the dangers that liminality can entail (Szakolczai "Living Permanent Liminality" 41) precisely because "[i]n liminality there is no certainty concerning the outcome" (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 5). Actually, literature, and the Brontës' novels in particular, has tended to focus precisely on those instances of troubled becomings which are sometimes the result of the neophyte rebelling against illegitimate, self-proclaimed masters, as Heathcliff and Catherine Linton are shown to do in this novel.

Thus, Hareton stands alone in his position as grateful victim. While one could argue for gender being the factor that makes a difference in the characters' attitudes, we cannot forget that Heathcliff is the orphan *par excellence* in this novel, and, as Catherine Linton does many years after him, he also tried – and managed – to rise above the debased position Hindley had dragged him into (188) – thus also ruling out the question of education as differentiator. Nonetheless, and in spite of Heathcliff's initial status being the trigger of most crises in the novel, using him as example of orphanhood poses a problem: in contrast to the Victorian "orphan-convention", supposed to "provid[e] the heroine with vast new spaces – both physical and psychological – in which to operate" (Humble and Reynolds 24), Heathcliff is the only orphan in this novel whose space actually opens up. While Catherine and Hareton remain secluded at the Heights, Heathcliff, being able to benefit from the potentiality offered by the liminal stage, goes from Liverpool to the

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[45] Although the full story takes place in a rural, isolated area, there are three characters who establish a connection between the Heights and industrialised, metropolitan areas: Mr Earnshaw, Heathcliff, and Lockwood.

Heights, then goes away to improve himself and comes back already showing his (economic) capacity and disposition to become master of the Earnshaws' and Lintons' estates, which he eventually achieves. Therefore, whereas we can see the results of Heathcliff's development as he progresses in life, Hareton could ultimately be read as the offspring of the stagnation that breeds at the Heights – a reading which nonetheless is proved wrong by the ending of the story, which restores Hareton to property, social status, and sense of kin upon Heathcliff's death. On the other hand, we could see in Hareton an extreme representation of the Lockean subject, preparing the path for a generic *Bildungsroman* that is never narrated to completion – in the same way as Heathcliff's ascent in life is omitted from the narrative – with Heathcliff's death as the starting point of the character's rite of passage towards independence and fulfilment.

When Hareton, Catherine, and Heathcliff come together for tea, we can see through Lockwood the great extent to which they are experiencing a liminal hotspot. Once the characters get together in "the house" the condensation of the three dimensions of liminality is in full operation and reaches the reader through the "emotional overheat" which, in this case, has already led to a "burnout" and which are evidenced by the characters' interactions. "[F]erocious gaze[s]", "diabolical sneer[s]", "look[s] of hatred", and "clenched [fists]" bring about a "dismal spiritual atmosphere" (12-14) which Lockwood cannot decode: "[t]hey could not sit every day so grim and taciturn, and it was impossible, however ill-tempered they might be, that the universal scowl they wore was their every day countenance" (12, 13).

What is particularly interesting about the way these characters interact with each other is that the impact that liminality can have on identity does not deprive them of their individual traits: that is, they do not stand as a homogenous 'cohort'.

Although all three of them have undergone a collapse of differences as regards social order and structure, and, as Lockwood's mistakes constantly remind us, they lack a defined status in terms of family or class position, they do not work *en masse*; that is, this group of liminars does not operate as a coherent homogeneous unit, thus challenging Turner's assumption that neophytes become "homogenized" (*Ritual Process* 95):

> 'I'll go with [Lockwood] as far as the park,' [Hareton] said.
>
> '*You'll go with him to hell!*' exclaimed his master, or whatever relation they bore. 'And who is to look after the horses, eh?'
>
> 'A man's life is of more consequence than one evening's neglect of the horses; somebody must go,' murmured Mrs Heathcliff, more kindly than I expected.
>
> 'Not at your command!' *retorted* Hareton. 'If you set store on him, *you'd better be quiet*.'
>
> 'Then *I hope his ghost will haunt you*; and I hope Mr Heathcliff will never get another tenant, till the Grange is a ruin!' she answered *sharply* [my emphases]. (17)

This dysfunctional "pleasant family circle" (14) results from the "emotional overheat" caused by an extended experience of suspended liminality: a group whose interactions are marked by threats, hatred, and aggressive remarks. It is no wonder that Lockwood, belonging to the social structure, "feel[s] unmistakably out of place" (14). As social discourses had it at the time, the family should be regarded as a sacred unit, and the home as the place where morality could be reinforced and a haven from the public world out of doors.[46] As the passage above shows, *Wuthering Heights* often resorts to the displacement of the domestic in favour of the Gothic: allusions to hell, haunting ghosts, and decisions over other people's life and death

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[46] See Davidoff and Hall, and Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* for extended analyses.

replace the polite, cosy conversation that would ideally take place around the fire, and function to bring to the fore the "emotional burnout" that has derived from the liminal hotspot. In this sense, the Gothic proves to be a genre which can easily give expression to the experience of liminal hotspots in fiction by means of its chief narrative characteristics. Apart from the relationships between the characters, the spatial and temporal dimensions in this novel also rely on Gothic features to convey the moments of greater tension and crisis; the main example being Lockwood's dream of Catherine Earnshaw's ghost.

The above passage not only shows the dangers of unrestrained liminality and how it can be expressed within Gothic conventions, it also challenges Victor Turner's dyadic model of structure versus antistructure, and demystifies his notion of communitas. In *The Rites of Passage*, Turner identifies

> two major 'models' for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system […] The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of a society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders. (96)

According to Turner's model, the main characters living at the Heights ought to stand in a relationship of communitas because they live out of the prevailing social structure – as opposed to Lockwood and the servants, who have a defined place in the social order. However, by understanding communitas as a community of equals, the group made by Heathcliff, Catherine Linton, and Hareton cannot be said to fit within Turner's model. Although trapped in liminality, they are not equals, as can be seen from Lockwood's descriptions; there is a hierarchy which governs that group

and that hierarchy is often contested. Therefore, they are not willing to "submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" because, among other things, there is no "ritual elder" among them, a fact which further problematizes the possibility of reintegration. What we find at the Heights is a *hierarchical communitas*, a variation which Turner's model does not provide for.

As much emphasis as Turner gives to the fact that neophytes are all made equal because they have "no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands" (*Ritual Process* 95), we can see how that is not the case at "the house". In fact, not only *Wuthering Heights*, but also Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* allows for the consideration of hierarchy among neophytes during the Lowood chapters, when Jane narrates how the older girls abused the young ones: "from this deficiency of nourishment resulted an abuse which pressed hardly on the younger pupils: whenever the famished great girls had an opportunity they would coax or menace the little ones out of their portion" (C. Brontë *Jane Eyre* 62). Therefore, while there can be no denying that the girls at Lowood are depicted as neophytes – "they were uniformly dressed in brown stuff frocks of quaint fashion, and long holland pinafores" (46) – it does not follow that they make a community of equals.

Building on Turner's work, Thomassen has stated that "[t]he *communitas* that comes out of liminality may be recognized as a deeply bounded human collectivity; but whether this collectivity engages in loving care toward the other or in violent destruction we really cannot say in any general way" (*Liminality and the Modern* 84). This way, Thomassen allows for violence among neophytes, thus demystifying previous romanticized notions of communitas that emerged from Turner's work.

Although Thomassen does not allude directly to hierarchy among initiands,[47] the possibility of violence among them necessarily rules out the question of equality. Thomassen's is a much more nuanced approach to the possible outcomes of liminality, and one that helps to validate a reading of the situation at the Heights – and Lowood – as a *hierarchical communitas*, even though, more recently, Georgsen and Thomassen have stated that

> [the] correlation between unmediated unity and spontaneous freedom is *precisely* what characterizes "communitas." Communitas generates the feeling of unity in the sense that the special bond between the neophytes resembles the close bond between members of a family yet without the hierarchy associated with family structures. (206, 207)

This statement may seem to argue for the impossibility of reading the trio Heathcliff-Catherine-Hareton as an instance of *hierarchical communitas* by introducing the comparison between communitas and family and hinting at the absence of hierarchy as the main differentiator between them. However, careful analysis actually allows for the possibility of reading the group at the Heights as standing in a relation of *hierarchical communitas* in spite of their family ties. First of all, although Heathcliff is Hareton and Catherine's uncle and also the latter's father-in-law, he does not observe the responsibilities or affective bonds normatively associated with such familial relationships. The family ties have been replaced by economic and mercantile interests on Heathcliff's side: he keeps Catherine as hostage and his only interest in her marrying his son was that he could inherit the Lintons' property; and

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[47] When dealing with hierarchy and liminality, social scientists propose the figure of the trickster as ruler of neophytes. However, the fact that the trickster is an outsider who is not being impacted by the suspended transition in place does not satisfactorily address the question of hierarchy among neophytes. A clear example of this state is represented by soldiers in the trenches who, even in a state of liminality, still need to abide by the military hierarchy. For discussions about the trickster figure see especially Szakolczai, Horváth, Horváth and Thomassen, and Thomassen.

he treats Hareton as a servant, thus establishing almost a master-slave relationship. Although Hareton seems to look up to him as a father, any emotional bond is restrained and concealed until Heathcliff's death (335).

Moreover, Georgsen and Thomassen highlight "spontaneous freedom" as one of the chief running forces of communitas, but it is precisely the absence of freedom that has brought Heathcliff, Catherine, and Hareton together. If freedom is at the bottom of a process of communitas which "engages in loving care toward the other", then it should not surprise us that the opposite is what triggers a situation where "violent destruction" is the leitmotif. Actually, the fact that Georgsen and Thomassen take into account the affective dimension of liminality and allude to "feeling[s] of unity" and "special bond[s]" appearing between members of a loving communitas, accounts for the fact that the absence of those elements will trigger a violent communitas governed by hierarchy. What is more, the fact that they recognise how in liminality there is a "co-existence of anarchical and structural factors" (204) further allows for the consideration of *hierarchical communitas* as feasible and plausible, with the liminal hotspot developing at the Heights as illustration of its functioning.

Understanding the relationship between Heathcliff, Hareton, and Catherine as one governed by *hierarchical communitas* further evidences how this novel problematizes notions of family ties in antistructure and seems to grant greater meaningfulness to the concept of kinship,[48] a recurrent pattern in the Brontës' novels. By disregarding traditional rites of passage and normative models of family, Emily Brontë depicts a group of individuals who understand affect, loyalty, care, and respect as more binding than actual consanguinity. That is, in the same way as Mr

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[48] Structural anthropology approaches kinship systems as organizational structures that do not necessarily involve biological ties.

Earnshaw kept an extended household where kinship displaced familial ties, and we see Hindley reversing that pattern, Heathcliff ultimately goes back to a model of extended household for surveillance reasons. However, while Mr Earnshaw's household did resemble a situation of communitas, the experience of the liminal hotspot has blurred notions of bonding and the three characters at the Heights follow an 'every man for himself' strategy with the hope of surmounting liminality.

In fact, it is through a sense of kinship rather than family, that the main relationship in the novel is established. Although critics have traditionally seen the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw as the core of the several crises of undifferentiation narrated in *Wuthering Heights*, differences begin to collapse the moment Heathcliff is introduced to the household. Some thirty years before Lockwood arrives at the Heights, Mr Earnshaw comes back home from a trip to Liverpool with an unexpected surprise that is not well received by anyone in "the house":

> 'See here, wife; I was never so beaten with anything in my life; but you must e'en take it as a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil.'
>
> We crowded round, and, over Miss Cathy's head, I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child […] I was frightened and Mrs Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors […] the conclusion was that my mistress grumbled herself calm; and Mr Earnshaw told me to wash it, and give it clean things, and let it sleep with the children. (36, 37)

Mr Earnshaw's very first words of introduction referring to Heathcliff "as a gift of God" which looks "as if it came from the devil" break down one of the most basic and ancient of dichotomies: good and evil. In spite of his good disposition towards the child, he is stating beforehand the collapse of differences that is inherent in

Heathcliff – inherent because there is nothing he can do about his dark appearance – thus triggering a sense of threat that is felt by everyone. Through this dual reference to God and the devil, Mr Earnshaw is advancing the position that Heathcliff will be shown to occupy for a good part of the novel: that of scapegoat.

"[D]irty, ragged, [and] black-haired", Heathcliff's appearance does not anticipate a very promising start at the Heights: he is a child who produces fear in those looking at him. He is depicted as far removed from the idyllic romantic image of childhood; he is portrayed as semi-human. By the way in which Nelly describes the scene we may very well be expecting an animal to appear from under Mr Earnshaw's "great-coat" (36). In fact, the reactions upon Heathcliff's appearance highlight his animalistic condition: Mrs Earnshaw is "ready to fling it out of doors", and the first instructions that Mr Earnshaw gives are to "wash it". Through the characterization of Heathcliff, Emily Brontë introduces a fictional orphan who is mistreated without apparently serving to promote any kind of social criticism:[49] in contrast to many of Dickens's orphans, for example, Heathcliff does not suffer from the disgusting conditions legitimised by the Poor Laws. Being a male, he is not a vehicle through which to explore the dangers of unwatched girlhood.[50] This displacement of the Victorian literary "orphan-convention" works in favour of the construction of Heathcliff as a Gothic character who appropriates the qualities of a Byronic hero as the story progresses. From the moment he is introduced in the narrative Heathcliff's character remains constantly uncanny – a dark outsider whose past is never known and who will "love and hate, equally under cover" (6) thus effecting a displacement of the domestic.

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[49] Most critics read the character of Heathcliff as having been inspired either by victims of the Irish famine or of the slave-trade. Both readings rule out Heathcliff's Englishness.

[50] The perils of unwatched girlhood are one of the driving forces behind narratives of Victorian female orphans. See Dever, Bilston, and Reynolds and Humble.

The threat that Heathcliff represents to the household is what causes his rite of incorporation to fail. In his position as paterfamilias, Mr Earnshaw takes it upon himself to extend his household as he deems fit; he is the right person to let an outsider in. However, the other members of this basic social unit will not accept him: Heathcliff is thus shown to embody "the *paradox of in/exclusion* in which one finds oneself simultaneously accepted and rejected, or perhaps included *as* excluded" (Kofoed and Stenner 176). He is an outsider, the latest arrival, and, because of his looks, immediately regarded as polluting – "[the children] entirely refus[e] to have it in bed with them, or even in their room" (37). Both Heathcliff's physical appearance and the status he occupies in relation to the household posit him not only as liminar, but also as sacrificial victim, the target of a "sacred" violence that is aimed at cleansing the community and restoring the system of differences that is now tottering. Thus "the stupid little thing" is spat at by Cathy (37) and disregarded by everyone except for Mr Earnshaw:

> I [Nelly] put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, it crept to Mr Earnshaw's door and there he found it on quitting his chamber. Inquiries were made as to how it got there; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house. (37)

Nelly abandons Heathcliff in "the house" hoping the "gift of God" will disappear while still referring to him in animalistic terms. As a rightful member of the household – at this time Mr Earnshaw kept the ways of eighteenth-century yeomen and made his servants participate in the family's leisure time and meals in "the house" (43) – Nelly tries to save the family from the outcast by maintaining "a regulated system of distinctions" that safeguards structure on the level of space.

Heathcliff's christening is the rite that should incorporate him into the family even if there are no biological ties since "even where membership in a given caste or social class is hereditary […] the child is rarely considered a fully 'complete' member from birth" (Van Gennep 101). However, his initiation proves to be a failure. On the one hand, Heathcliff's christening represents not only his assimilation into the family but also into Christianity. Nonetheless, he remains a heretic figure throughout and just hours before his death he states "'I tell you, I have nearly attained *my* heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued, and uncoveted by me!'" (333). On the other hand, he is given "the name of a son who died in childhood, and it has served him ever since, both for Christian and surname" (38). The naming of Heathcliff – as many other namings in the novel – is problematic because it enacts a further undifferentiation: by being named after the child who, arguably, would have been Mr Earnshaw's heir, Heathcliff displaces Hindley, if only in name, as future master, thus foreshadowing what actually happens when Hindley dies. Moreover, this rite of naming, aimed at providing an identity, instead leaves Heathcliff in a permanent "limbo of statuslessness" (Turner *Ritual Process* 97): he is borrowing the name of a rightful Earnshaw and for this reason, I argue, the character is unable to ever attain the harmony that the generic *Bildungsroman* aims for. Due to the collapse of differences triggered by his failed incorporation, Heathcliff remains "a ghost in [the Earnshaws'] house" (Stewart 2).

By usurping the identity of a legitimate Earnshaw, Heathcliff represents a threat to the patriarchal status quo from which Hindley would benefit, and it is for this reason, because "[Mr Earnshaw] took to Heathcliff strangely", that Hindley comes to regard the outcast as "a usurper of his parent's affections, and his

privileges" (38). Hindley's reaction to this threat is a display of violence that will keep escalating until it is completely out of control:

> Miss Cathy and [Heathcliff] were now very thick; but Hindley hated him, and to say the truth I [Nelly] did the same; and we plagued and went on him shamefully […] He seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: he would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath, and open his eyes as if he had hurt himself by accident, and nobody was to blame. (38)

The fact that Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw become allies in spite of her initial disgust towards him may be the result of Victorian conventions: being a girl Catherine cannot see a threat in Heathcliff in the way her brother does – he will not deprive her from any financial gain. Nonetheless, Catherine Earnshaw remains a heroine who challenges Victorian ideals of femininity. As a girl she enjoys running wild in the moors and after her coming-out, her 'remodelling' at the Lintons' has only worked on the surface: she may marry Edgar for the sake of appearances but she remains faithful to Heathcliff even after death. In this sense, Heathcliff is Catherine Earnshaw's way out of Victorian constraints based on gender. Due to the symbiotic relationship that the couple is shown to develop, I argue that Catherine Earnshaw benefits from the potentiality afforded by Heathcliff's liminality, in the same way as once she becomes Catherine Linton she will suffer from it. Retrospectively, Heathcliff's endurance of Hindley's mistreatment and tyranny seem to be the price he accepts to pay in exchange for spending time with Catherine. It is only when Heathcliff can feel Catherine's detachment from him due to his degraded condition that he swears revenge: "'I'm trying to settle down how I shall pay

Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do!'" (61).

Heathcliff's suspended transition, due to his failed incorporation, and the violence that ensues help to form the liminal hotspot introduced to the reader at the beginning of the novel. After Mr Earnshaw dies in "the house" surrounded by Cathy, Heathcliff, and the servants (43, 44), Hindley – whose story of development is also omitted from the narrative – comes back to take over the place, and reverses the structure of the household: "on the very first day of his return, he told Joseph and me [Nelly] that we must henceforth quarter ourselves in the back-kitchen, and leave the house for him" (46), thus displacing notions of kinship in favour of consanguinity. As for his treatment of Heathcliff,

> a few words from [his wife], evincing a dislike to Heathcliff, were enough to rouse in him all his old hatred of the boy. He drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labour out of doors instead, compelling him to do so, as hard as any other lad on the farm. (46)

This passage evidences how Heathcliff's later treatment of Hareton replicates the one he received from Hindley, thus showing the mimetic quality of crisis. However, in Hindley's case, he also expels Heathcliff from "the house" and relegates him to the back-kitchen, marking his status as outsider and liminar in spatial as well as in social terms.

Hindley's return to the Heights is soon followed by Edgar Linton's appearance. Although these two characters represent opposing notions of masculinity and domestic codes – with Thrushcross Grange meeting and crystalizing the

Victorian ideal of domesticity – together they fuel and ignite a number of crises which develop from their provocation of Heathcliff.

> 'Begone, you [Heathcliff] vagabond! What, you are attempting the coxcomb, are you? Wait till I [Hindley] get hold of those elegant locks – see if I won't pull them a bit longer!'
>
> 'They are long enough already,' observed Master Linton, peeping from the doorway; 'I wonder they don't make his head ache. It's like a colt's mane over his eyes!' He ventured this remark without any intention to insult; but Heathcliff's violent nature was not prepared to endure the appearance of impertinence from one whom he seemed to hate, even then, as a rival. He seized a tureen of hot apple-sauce […] and dashed it full against the speaker's face and neck – who instantly commenced a lament that brought Isabella and Catherine hurrying to the place. (59)

This passage shows how Heathcliff, whose transition has been suspended at this point in the story for some years, is affected by the "emotional overheat" characteristic of liminal hotspots. Given the mimetic quality of crisis and violence, as analysed by Turner, Girard, or Thomassen, Heathcliff is shown to lose control in an exercise of mimesis which makes him echo Hindley's aggressive behaviour, thus giving way to further violence. Used to being physically mistreated, Heathcliff takes to violence to defend himself. In spite of Nelly's allusion to his "violent nature", the fact that he has had to grow used to, for instance, being flogged by Hindley makes him imitate the patterns of behaviour that have been used against him. Heathcliff's violent reaction also helps to further displace the domestic ideal at the Heights: he uses a kitchen utensil to attack Edgar, thus re-inscribing the domestic space as a locus of violence and hatred.

Moreover, the setting of this particular crisis is especially relevant: it takes place right in-between "the house" and the kitchen. The back-kitchen at the Heights is next to "the house" and in this scene, we can see how Heathcliff and Nelly start in the kitchen and begin to move towards the "the house": "I [Nelly] urged [Heathcliff] to hasten now, and show his amiable humour; and he willingly obeyed: but ill luck would have it that, as he opened the door leading from the kitchen on one side, Hindley opened it on the other" (58). The action takes place right in between the two spaces, with Linton "peeping from the door-way".

Although there are a great number of crises staged in "the house" – Catherine Earnshaw slaps Nelly (71), Hindley drops baby Hareton from over the bannister (75) and threatens to set the house on fire (76), Heathcliff comes close to killing Hindley (178, 179) – the passage above shows the danger of uncontrolled liminality: once a liminal hotspot develops any number of individuals and spaces can become affected by the violence and "emotional burnout" caused by extended periods of uncertainty. [51] *Wuthering Heights* shows how narrative conventions about the correlation of space and plot, the fact that "*each space determines, or at least encourages, its own kind of story* […] *this* specific form needs *that* specific space" [emphasis in the original] (Moretti *Atlas* 70), work in relation to the concept of the liminal hotspot. As the main plot develops and sub-plots appear, so do new spaces become affected by the liminal hotspot that initially develops at the Heights, thus turning "back regions" into "front regions" and vice versa.[52] In *Wuthering Heights*, this is depicted through two "back regions" that become polluted by the liminal

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[51] In their case studies about liminal hotspots both Georgsen and Thomassen, and Kofoed and Stenner pay attention to how crowds or groups are affected by and react to this state of suspended transition, but they do not truly explore the ways in which the liminal hotspot may get out of control and affect individuals or places initially alien to its origin.

[52] Goffman identifies a "front region" as "the place where the performance is given" (109, 110), that is, the main stage; while a "'back region' or 'backstage'" is the place "where supressed facts make an appearance" (114).

hotspot of which Heathcliff is the main representative: the back-kitchen and Thrushcross Grange.

In many instances of the novel the back-kitchen at the Heights is represented as an appendix to "the house" and stands in special contrast to it because it is constructed as a safe space – both psychological and physically.[53] The kitchen is the place where secrets are shared, confessions made, and comfort is sought and provided:

> 'Make haste, Heathcliff!' I [Nelly] said, 'the kitchen is so comfortable – and Joseph is upstairs; make haste, and let me dress you smart before Miss Cathy comes out – and then you can sit together, with the whole hearth to yourselves, and have a long chatter till bedtime'. (56)

In her role as housemaid Nelly is the main inhabitant of the kitchen, and the person who tries to spread some peace among the chaos into which the Heights is increasingly shown to descend. Thus, she is also the recipient of Heathcliff's and Catherine Earnshaw's longings: "'But, Nelly, if I [Heathcliff] knocked [Edgar] down twenty times, that wouldn't make him less handsome, or me more so. I wish I had light hair and fair skin, and was dressed, and behaved as well, and had the chance of being as rich as he will be!'" (57). This is one of the few instances when Heathcliff opens up about his insecurities regarding Catherine, and stands in contrast with his earlier, more childish statement: "'I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here, for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange – not if I might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley's blood!'" (49).

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[53] In fact, when Isabella feels in danger at the Heights she escapes to or through the kitchen (140, 175, 183).

However, as much as the kitchen at the Heights tries to emulate Emily Brontë's own experience of the kitchen at Haworth, and articulates the concept of "kitchen legacy" (Davis 365) by turning it into a safe space where oppression can be temporarily evaded, crisis also enters this space.[54] One of the turning points in the novel is caused by a confession that takes place precisely in the kitchen. When Catherine Earnshaw tells Nelly about her future marriage to Linton and declares her love for Heathcliff, the latter happens to overhear part of the conversation (77-83). This is the event that triggers Heathcliff's sudden departure and Catherine's first nervous fever. The kitchen has thus become polluted by crisis, a fact which is explicitly made evident when, just a few hours after Catherine and Nelly's conversation, "a huge bough fell across the roof, and knocked down a portion of the east chimney-stack, sending a clatter of stones and soot into the kitchen fire" (85). From this moment onwards, the kitchen that Nelly was in the habit of "making cheerful with great fires" and filling with the "rich scent of […] heating spices […] shining kitchen utensils [and] the speckless purity of [her] particular care" (55) starts a process of decay that leads Isabella to describe it as "a dingy, untidy hole" (137) three years after.

Together with the kitchen at the Heights, Thrushcross Grange is the other place that suffers most from the escalation of crisis contained in this novel. The Grange stands in binary opposition to Wuthering Heights, thus recreating "the existence of two antithetical spaces from whose opposition arise [some of the]

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[54] Olga Idriss Davis has observed how "[d]uring the antebellum period, black women invented the cultural space of the kitchen to recover their dignity and the power of tradition. As they emerged from the kitchen of black-dominated space into the dining room of white-dominated space, they brought intellectual notions of collective experience and struggles with which to give expression to their social, political, and cultural contributions to American history" (365).

fundamental events of the plot" (Moretti *Atlas* 107).[55] We first get an impression of how different the Grange is from the Heights through Heathcliff's description: "'we saw – ah! it was beautiful – a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers'" (48). There are no allusions to food storage, pewter dishes, primitive structures, or bared floors here. The Grange is shown to follow the conventions of late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries domesticity, projecting cosiness and light for any looker-on: it is a place to be seen and admired thanks to its ornamental display.

Nonetheless, the choice of crimson and white makes the room resemble a limbo: a place in between hell – as represented by the crimson carpets and covers – and heaven – symbolised by the "pure white ceiling bordered by gold" from which some majestic light emanates. This in-betweenness conveyed by the ornamental arrangement of the space foreshadows how in spite of its adherence to social codes, the Grange also has the potential of being contaminated by the offspring of antistructure. In fact, we can see how Isabella laments Heathcliff's coming into contact with the Grange: "'[w]hen I recollect how happy we were – how happy Catherine was before he came. I'm fit to curse the day'" (182), which furthers the notion of the inability to contain liminal hotspots in a defined and delimited space.[56]

Due to Heathcliff's initial failed assimilation at the Heights, the Grange represents a territory into which he will never manage to become incorporated. Actually, once he inherits it he refuses to settle there even if staying at the Heights

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[55] The original quote states that "all the fundamental events of the plot" derive from this spatial opposition, however, as I have been showing, that is not exactly the case in *Wuthering Heights*.

[56] Graeme Tytler mentions Catherine Earnshaw's "disruptive effect on Edgar's orderly household" (231), however, it is Heathcliff's impact on Catherine, as Isabella asserts, that brings the disruption on.

means "living in a situation and residence so much inferior" (34). No matter how polluted it may momentarily get, the Grange remains part of the established social order; the reason why, after the Lintons, Lockwood becomes its first tenant: a structured space needs to be inhabited by someone equally belonging to social structure. Indeed, even upon his return as a wealthy man who already has the dress and manners of a gentleman, Heathcliff's original otherness is superimposed upon this "renewed otherness" (Poklad 101) thus marking him as outsider and a threat to the in-group, making Edgar Linton try to protect his territory in spatial terms:[57]

'Shall I [Catherine Earnshaw] tell [Heathcliff] to come up?'

'Here,' [Edgar] said, 'into the parlour?'

'Where else?' she asked.

He looked vexed, and suggested the kitchen as a more suitable place for him. (95)

The Grange resists being shattered by the collapse of differences that Heathcliff embodies. As a place where Victorian domestic conventions rule spatial arrangements in relation to class and propriety, an outcast like Heathcliff does not belong in the parlour. That is why Linton warns Catherine that "[t]he whole household need not witness the sight of [her] welcoming a runaway servant as a brother" (96), further showing how no one except for Catherine considers Heathcliff to have become assimilated into society. In contrast to the Heights, the arrangement at the Grange shows how spaces are delimited according to function and class, and so, a *déclassé* individual like Heathcliff has to be exiled to the kitchen, where the lower ranks belong. In this sense Linton takes the same measures as Hindley did. However, unlike the latter, he does so in order to follow the social contract that

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[57] Turner explains how "an in-group preserves its identity against members of out-groups, [and] protects itself against threats to its way of life" (*Ritual Process* 110-111).

would separate male from female, and upstairs from downstairs, irrespective of economic value.

Nonetheless, in spite of Linton's efforts to keep his household free from the potential for crisis that radiates from Heathcliff, the process of undifferentiation hits Thrushcross Grange. This is the reason why violence and "emotional overheat" eventually enter this space:

> 'This is insufferable!' [Linton] exclaimed. 'It is disgraceful that she should own him for a friend, and force his company on me! Call me two men out of the hall, Ellen – Catherine shall linger no longer to argue with the law ruffian – I have humoured her enough […] How is this?' said Linton addressing her; 'what notion of propriety must you have to remain here, after the language which has been held to you by that blackguard? […] I have been so far forbearing with you [Heathcliff], sir,' he said quietly; 'not that I was ignorant of your miserable, degraded character […] Your presence is a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous – for that cause, and to prevent worse consequences, I shall deny you, hereafter, admission into this house, and give notice, now, that I require your instant departure' […] [Heathcliff] approached and gave the chair on which Linton rested a push. He'd better have kept his distance: my master quickly sprang erect, and struck him full on the throat a blow that would have levelled a slighter man. It took his breath for a minute; and, while he choked, Mr Linton walked out by the back door into the yard, and from thence, to the front entrance. (113-115)

This passage shows the mimetic quality of crisis and how violence is contagious: Edgar Linton, representative of the middle classes, is characterized throughout the novel as the most effeminate male character – until Linton Heathcliff is introduced in the narrative – and stands in contrast not only to Heathcliff, but also to Hindley. This scene, however, shows how the "emotional overheat" escalates making him

transition between opposite models of masculinity. When he resorts to violence, Linton momentarily aligns himself with the males at the Heights, only to make his escape through the back door right afterwards. Crisis has entered the Grange and so we can see how Linton imitates others' attitudes in addressing antistructure. And, although this scene has been contained in the kitchen, crisis keeps escalating and permeating other spaces at the Grange: Catherine becomes delirious again and locks herself in her room for several days (120); Linton shuts himself up in the library to avoid further confrontations with his wife (120); and Isabella finally elopes with Heathcliff (132). This way, Heathcliff's intrusion at the Grange changes the lives of its inhabitants forever.

In fact, in *Wuthering Heights* death seems to be the only available option to extinguish liminal hotspots. It is only when Heathcliff dies that the Heights arguably returns to social order and structure: Hareton and Catherine Linton finally inherit the properties that were legitimately theirs, and the previous atmosphere of hatred is supplanted by love.

When Lockwood returns to the Heights in 1802 he can immediately notice a change in the space: "I had neither to climb the gate, nor to knock – it yielded to my hand. That is an improvement! I thought. And I noticed another, by the aid of my nostrils; a fragrance of stocks and wall flowers, wafted on the air, from among the homely fruit trees" (307). The old fortified version of the Heights has given way to a free open space where life can flourish. Nonetheless, after thirty years of crisis, the place still retains a "grim" air for the survivors of the liminal hotspot; that is why, once Catherine and Hareton get married they will move to the Grange (336) to firmly

secure their position in structure also in spatial terms.[58] In any case, the third generation has managed to resolve the "paradoxical challenge" that a liminal hotspot poses: "that of creating something truly new and lasting out of an extra-ordinary situation in which the actors involved possess in advance neither the tools to enact a novel structure, nor easily identifiable ceremony masters to blaze the trail" (Georgsen and Thomassen 199).

Nonetheless, death in *Wuthering Heights* is depicted both as liberating and as a further liminal stage. Once Catherine Earnshaw has to decide between structure – by marrying Linton – or antistructure – by remaining faithful to Heathcliff – her identity becomes split. During the night Lockwood spends at the Heights in her old room he comes across her writing, "scratched on the paint" of the window ledge, which "was nothing but a mere name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small – *Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*" (19). Catherine's split identity has left a physical trace on space and makes her old room a liminal place.

On the one hand Catherine's room features "a large oak case, with squares cut near the top, resembling coach windows […] it formed a little closet" with panelled sides that provide privacy to the sleeper (19). Catherine's bed then resembles in structure and purpose a coffin. In fact, it is in this bed that Heathcliff breathes his last (335), which enacts a further process of undifferentiation with the same space serving both as a young girl's bedroom where she day-dreams about her future, and deathbed, which represents the complete nullification of futurity. On the other hand, in spite of the process of undifferentiation that takes place in this room, Heathcliff wants to keep it unpolluted from the presence of outsiders, thus endowing

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[58] Armstrong has stated that "Hareton's rise into power does represent the reform of an intolerably authoritarian society" through "a return to the past" ("Emily Brontë In and Out" 100). However, this reading completely obscures both Catherines' influence over the liminal hotspot.

this space with a quasi-sacred quality: "'And who showed you [Lockwood] up to this room? [...] Who was it? I've a good mind to turn them out of the house this moment!'" (26). The panelled room is a shrine to Catherine *Earnshaw*, the Catherine who Heathcliff became one with.

The in-betweenness of this room becomes explicitly evident to the reader upon the apparition of Catherine's ghost to Lockwood: "I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement [...] stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch: instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand!" (25). The window in this room, a physical threshold, is depicted as a portal between two worlds, and Catherine's apparition evidences that although her final decision to marry Linton grants her a fixed point in structure, from an emotional and psychological level, Catherine Earnshaw's transition becomes suspended, thus showing how traditional rites of passage do not always grant the expected outcome.

The symbiosis between Catherine and Heathcliff that is shown to develop as they grow up together and is clearly articulated by Catherine's "I *am* Heathcliff" (82) problematizes both characters' rites of passage.

> 'I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire'. (81)

Catherine's words allude to the spiritual union between her and Heathcliff: she refers to their souls as being the same, to Heathcliff being more herself than she is. Taking into account that man and woman symbolically become one upon marriage, and the

ostensible disregard for traditional rites of passage in this novel, I argue that Catherine already feels secularly "married" to Heathcliff, meaning that, in her eyes, her marriage to Linton would not be legitimate. Moreover, her references to eternity, her stress on the fact that she and Heathcliff will not be separated as long as she lives (82), further reinforce the idea underlying religious matrimony, considered valid "until death do us part". By placing spirituality above traditional rituals, Catherine is shown to disregard a very significant part of religion in favour of a more natural and simple communion between human beings, a union much more attuned to Turner's concept of "communitas".

Catherine's final rite of passage, her transition into eternal rest, also becomes truncated due to the failure of her funerary rituals and the fact that she and Heathcliff are one, a plot twist that adds to the Gothic tone of the novel:

> 'May she wake in torment!' [Heathcliff] cried […] 'And I pray one prayer – I repeat it till my tongue stiffens – Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you – haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers. I believe – I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!'. (169)

With this 'anti-prayer' addressed to Catherine *Earnshaw*, Heathcliff reverses her marriage to Edgar Linton and invokes Catherine's own words about their eternal union. Moreover, this passage shows how Heathcliff articulates his liminality and suspended transition as a person dead to a world he sees as an "abyss". Upon Heathcliff's summons, Catherine becomes "stuck in liminality" and cannot fulfil her transition into eternity, which leads to the apparition of her ghost, who goes back to

the Heights in search of her former, clearly delimited self: "'It's twenty years,' mourned the voice, 'twenty years, I've been a waif for twenty years!'" (25).

As for Heathcliff, the process of undifferentiation that was triggered by his introduction at the Heights continues beyond his death; only that this new collapse of differences has the grave as setting. Feeling that death is fast upon him, Heathcliff gives the following instructions to Nelly regarding his burial:

> '[the corpse] is to be carried to the churchyard, in the evening. You and Hareton may, if you please, accompany me – and mind, particularly that the sexton obeys my directions concerning the two coffins! No minister need come; nor need anything be said over me'. (333)

The "directions concerning the two coffins" that Heathcliff had already arranged with the sexton imply being buried next to Catherine with the touching sides of the two coffins being open so they can finally become one, "and then, by the time Linton gets to [them], he'll not know which is which" (288). Heathcliff's arrangements for his and Catherine's afterlife imply a collapse of differences by which the lover will be buried next to the wife and displace the husband. Moreover, the fact that he wants the two corpses to decompose next to each other so that their matter can become mixed enacts the actual physical merging of two people in one, thus reversing the "till death do us part" formula, since, in Catherine and Heathcliff's case, death will be the rite of passage that unites them forever.

Heathcliff's plans imply that his attainment of happiness is left out from the narrative, a fact that culminates Brontë's displacement of generic stories of development and narrows the focus of the novel entirely to suspended transitions. It is only through death that Heathcliff escapes earthly liminality, because "[i]f moving into liminality can best be captured as a loss of home and a ritualized rupture with

the world as we know it, any movement out of liminality must somehow relate to a sort of home-coming" (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 17). And it is only in Catherine Earnshaw that Heathcliff feels at home. [59] With this suggestion of reassimilation for Heathcliff, Emily Brontë culminates her challenge to the traditional *Bildungsroman* by devoting a whole novel to a male character who manages to develop while trapped in a state of suspended transition and whose 'happy ending' completely departs from the generic notions identified by Lukács or Moretti.

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[59] I fully agree with Tytler's point that "there is little to suggest that [Heathcliff] ever truly feels at home in [the Heights]" (234).

CHAPTER 2

"[H]er life was pale; her prospects desolate": suspended transitions in *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë presents *Jane Eyre* (1848) in a similar way to *The Professor*. By subtitling the novel "An Autobiography", readers and critics alike have approached it as a female *Bildungsroman*.[60] These readings, especially feminist ones, have helped to prove the inability of the generic *Bildung* and autobiography to narrate female stories of maturation and have led to the conclusion that Brontë's novel appropriates "the male pattern of development for its protagonist" (Locy 107). Since the *Bildungsroman* is inscribed within a hetero-normative tradition that marks the genre as male and public, what the *Bildung* ultimately illustrates is a stereotypical process of male development (Locy 105) which is individualistic, linear and white (Moretti "Preface" ix). Similarly, (auto)biographies have been generally considered "the published record of a life that has claims to the attention of the public" (Juhasz 663), and in being public that life was traditionally male. If Brontë's novel cannot be comfortably labelled as a *Bildungsroman* it is not because the protagonist is a woman,[61] but rather, as this Chapter shows, because *Jane Eyre* is the story of an individual whose transition in between the different statuses that constitute a rite of passage and a traditional story of development, has been suspended. That is, Jane Eyre is shown to develop, but this process of development takes place within the liminal stage, a fact which resists the generic *Bildungsroman* and its "lawlike" progression (Dilthey 336) because this transitional state takes up most of the narrative.

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[60] See for example Abel et al. 11; Boumelha 63; Cohn 4; Moretti, *Way* 11.

[61] Chapter 1 in this dissertation shows how Heathcliff's development also resists the pattern established by the generic *Bildungsroman* due to his suspended transition.

Moreover, the love story between Jane and Rochester has been considered the core of the novel, because, it has been argued, "Brontë cannot but place at the centre of her texts the expression of desire as want or need" (Boumelha 20). Nonetheless, as a novel preoccupied with, as I suggest, suspended transitions, *Jane Eyre* devotes thirty-three chapters to the heroine's "psychosocial experience" (Greco and Stenner 148) of the liminal hotspot and resolves the romantic plot between Jane and Rochester in four. What Brontë places at the centre, therefore, is the story of the heroine's suspended transition and her efforts to overcome liminality on her own terms. In fact, even if Jane's process of development – her personal rite of passage – is the overarching motif of the novel, as its subtitle suggests, this chapter explores how that development is made possible by the potentiality offered by the liminal stage rather than by the protagonist's submission to "be determined from without", a condition that, according to Moretti, is key for the successful *Bildungsroman* (*Way* 21).

Analysing *Jane Eyre* through anthropological theories of liminality affords the possibility of departing from traditional romanticized readings of the heroine and allows for an understanding of how the text resists contemporary literary forms and sits in between different cultural discourses of the period. "[M]ainstream Victorian anthropology, massively invested in the project of constructing *one single narrative* about the evolution of social forms and technologies, was committed to dealing with levels of human culture […] from primitive to advanced" [my emphasis] (Buzard 6). While *Jane Eyre* arguably adheres to Victorian cultural formulations about race, empire, etc., it strongly questions and subverts contemporary discourses about gender and class which argued that "the evolutionary process culminat[ed] in a

monogamous family resembling that of mid-Victorian Britain" (Stocking Jr. 204).[62]

And it is precisely the heroine's suspended transition that allows for this subversion.

Jane Eyre's suspended transition is initially caused by her social destitution; however, the occasion for a liminal hotspot progresses as the heroine's liminal stage becomes expanded, showing how

> a liminal hotspot […] is *an occasion characterised by the experience of being trapped in the interstitial dimension between different forms-of-process, and in the situation of ontological indeterminacy that characterises such a dimension.* [emphasis in the original] (Greco and Stenner 152)[63]

Due to her initial failed incorporation into structure, Jane is shown to occupy a "limbo of statuslessness" (Turner *Ritual Process* 97) throughout the novel. Moreover, the different settings in the narrative function to depict Jane in situations that deprive her of the means of becoming incorporated because, in an exercise of radical empowering afforded by the potentiality of the liminal stage, the heroine is shown to reject her appointed masters and mistresses of ceremonies. These instances of revolution against structured rites of passage show the heroine challenging the normative social order and proving how its power structures are ineffectual in as much as they do not afford harmony between female individuality and society, a further reason why this novel departs from the generic *Bildungsroman*: Jane Eyre will not submit to be shaped from without. As a consequence of this, her suspended transition and her experience of the liminal hotspot become extended and the heroine is shown to inhabit "the interstices of social structure" (Turner *Ritual Process* 125) and to occupy the position of the scapegoat.

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[62] See also Fee for an analysis of the impact that anthropology had in Victorian discourses about sexual politics.

[63] Greco and Stenner's "forms-of-process" refer to the different stages in a rite of passage.

If Jane's space never opens up – the novel starts with a telling "[t]here was no possibility of taking a walk that day" (9) – in spite of the multiple settings portrayed in the narrative and the fact that some of the heroine's territorial passages have been understood as a "voyage out" (Stoneman 34) it is because although "no bird" (Brontë 252) Jane is shown to be ensnared by the nets of normative social order. The protagonist's multiple "no['s] to the pre-existing order", which Georgsen and Thomassen identify as characteristic of "revolutionary liminality" (206), make the heroine's assimilation into social order delayed by the representatives of the status quo who are shown to do their utmost to prevent the process of undifferentiation that Jane keeps threatening to cause, and which would lead to crisis.

Although traditionally Anne Brontë has been considered the social reformer among the sisters, *Jane Eyre* gives such emphasis to the wrongs of custom and includes the representation of so many rites of purification that it may be worth asking whether the novel itself is not an attempt at cleansing society by providing it with new "forms-of-process" (Kofoed and Stenner 177) which result from the "transforming grace of in-between places" (Georgsen and Thomassen 207).

It is in an in-between state that we meet Jane Eyre – frequently Charlotte Brontë's protagonists are introduced to the reader already in the liminal stage. This liminality is usually derived from orphanhood – except for Lucy Snowe (*Villette*), all the main characters are orphans by the time the narration starts. [64] In treating orphanhood as a marker of liminality I am considering it a condition which can be redressed through adoption (Van Gennep 38), or through a renewed sense of kinship. The Brontës' characters who are shown to be left completely destitute through

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[64] Although in *Shirley* there is a reencounter between Caroline Helstone and her mother, for a great part of the novel Caroline is depicted as an orphan.

orphanhood are also deprived of any meaningful relationship based on kinship and it is through the latter that the protagonists manage to finally attain a sense of belonging. By stressing kinship over family ties, a pattern I also analyse in Chapter 1, the Brontës' novels highlight the importance of determinations of kinship and inheritance while at the same time displacing the Victorian ideal of family.

In spite of the recurrence of the orphan-as-liminar figure in these novels, the protagonists' rite of separation caused by bereavement, which "implies the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions […] or from both" (Turner *Ritual Process* 94), is not usually part of the narrative. This omission evidences the Brontës' frequent disregard for traditional rites of passage and functions to introduce the characters *in medias res*: with no background details that provide a sense of their previous point in structure. However, *Jane Eyre* offers a brief account of Jane's parents' lives and deaths:

> I learned for the first time […] that my father had been a poor clergyman; that my mother had married him against the wishes of her friends, who considered the match beneath her; that my grandfather Reed was so irritated at her disobedience, he cut her off without a shilling; that after my father and mother had been married a year, the latter caught the typhus fever […] that my mother took the infection from him, and both died within a month of each other. (28)

This excerpt provides the foundations for Jane's liminality. Since "the child is rarely considered a fully 'complete' member from birth" (Van Gennep 101), having lost her parents when still a baby, Jane never had the chance of being properly incorporated into structure, causing the protagonist to be positioned in a limbo marked by "statuslessness". In fact, it has been noted how Jane is rejected "from

below as well as from above" (Politi 57) and is actually pronounced to be "less than a servant" (14). Indeed, Jane's in-betweenness places her closer to the lower ranks of society. [65]

Moreover, the fact that Jane's parents were poor makes the child materially dependent thus adding to her liminal attributes, a situation very different from Shirley's, for example, who though an orphan has the material means to support herself and the empowerment derived from social rank and money.[66] In this sense, the only thing that Jane seems to have inherited are the consequences of her mother's disowned status and the stigma of her father's poverty, as she is reminded at a very early age by her male cousin:

> 'You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentleman's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma's expense'. (12)

Depicted as occupying the position of "included *as* excluded" (Kofoed and Stenner 176) characteristic of liminal hotspots due to her marginal status at her relatives' house, the first stages of Jane's "psychosocial experience" of extended liminality are shown to be strongly marked by material dependence.

The first setting in the novel offers the reader a small-scale picture of Victorian middle-class domesticity as portrayed by many novelists of the time, that is, it depicts the middle class showing contempt for and keeping a distance from those who do not belong with them. Although the Reeds are Jane's direct relatives,

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[65] Rochester checks her appearance against his servants' (116) and Hannah takes her for a "vagrant" (331).
[66] The account about Jane's parents and its implications challenge the understanding shared by many critics of *Jane Eyre* as an ostensibly middle-class woman for, had her parents lived, the family would have probably belonged to the group of the so-called "genteel poor".

the neophyte occupies the position of "being formally invited in, but implicitly cast out" (Kofoed and Stenner 177) – much like William Crimsworth's position at his brother's – and "outside observer", a role that implies a "marginal status" (Gargano 786) but which nonetheless grants a certain power of vision derived from the potentiality that liminality entails – a position also shared by Lucy Snowe.

Jane Eyre's opening lines show the psychosocial displacement that Jane undergoes by embodying "the *paradox of in/exclusion*" [emphasis in the original] (Kofoed and Stenner 176), a position that implies isolation.[67] From stating that "[t]here was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning […] I was glad of it" (9), little Jane goes on to describe the familial scene she is not invited to join:

> The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. *Me*, she had dispensed from joining the group [my emphasis]. (9)

The subtle shift in pronouns from "we" to "I" strengthens Jane's account of her own liminality: she is not a participant in the tableau staged by her aunt and cousins. In fact, this scene, with Jane excluded from the nuclear family, echoes Heathcliff's position at Wuthering Heights:[68] in both cases the neophytes are introduced as children by the respective patriarchs against the family's wishes. Both masters' deaths leave the novices in a state of isolation that makes them the target of abuse by the masters' surrogates. Both Heathcliff and Jane are kept at a distance in the interest

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[67] In *The Rites of Passage*, Van Gennep explains how "an individual or group who does not have an immediate right, by birth or through specially acquired attributes, to enter a particular house and to become established in one of its sections is in a state of isolation […] such a person is weak, because he is outside a given group or society" (26).
[68] See Chapter 1 for an extended analysis.

of maintaining intact the system of differences that regulates structure and is considered essential to the social order and the status quo (Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 49).

Jane is perceived by Mrs Reed – in her role as keeper of the "in-group" (Turner *Ritual Process* 110) – as a threat due to the girl's failure to conform to Victorian ideals of childhood. Indeed, "[i]nnocence, purity, and clinging dependence in girlhood" (Bilston 29) were paramount elements in the Victorian ideal of childhood, which also shared some characteristics with the ideal of womanhood: "women, like children, represented the innocence of the natural world" (Davidoff and Hall 28). Additionally, Jane's marginal position at Gateshead involves the dangers inherent in extended liminality. Because "without reintegration liminality is pure danger" (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22), Jane runs the risk of becoming "stuck" in this threshold stage (22) if she does not comply with the rite of incorporation that Mrs Reed asks of her, that is, to behave according to Victorian middle-class ideals of childhood. This danger, however, can be understood to be bidirectional. On the one hand, Jane is displaced onto the margins of society, as represented by the Reeds' household, and runs the risk of becoming "the scapegoat of the nursery" (Brontë 17), the disposable individual whose sacrifice will maintain social order (Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 1-4). On the other hand, however, any liminar represents a danger to the society they are trying to be incorporated into precisely because they may shake the pre-existing order. In this sense Jane is shown to be both a threat to and a victim of social order.

> 'She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation, that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a

more attractive and sprightly manner – something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were – she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children'. (9)

Whereas Jane's cousin marks her as liminar due to her material dependence, Mrs Reed's reservations seem to stem from Jane's reported failure to comply with the ritualistic and theatrical character of everyday life (Turner *Anthropology of Performance* 81). The fact that during Victorian times "family became a kind of *performance* demanding just the right language, dress, and etiquette" [my emphasis] (Gillis 76) whose customs Jane does not seem to follow prevents Mrs Reed from incorporating the girl into the family circle and endowing her with the "privileges" reserved for those who belong. Thus, from the very first setting in the novel, we can see the dual nature of Jane's liminality, how it can be constraining and liberating at the same time: being a marginal individual Jane embodies the paradox of "in/exclusion" and, at the same time, thanks to the potentiality offered by the liminal stage, she rejects and is rejected. This duality will mark Jane's suspended transition since, even if she is offered the possibility of becoming incorporated, she will reject several masters of ceremonies to show she will not "accommodate[e] [herself] to society by resigning [herself] to accept its life forms" (Lukács 136), thus showing how Jane Eyre is not a suitable character for a *Bildungsroman*.

In addition, and building on Van Gennep's argument about rights by birth, the passage above shows how there are certain liminal attributes inherent in childhood – whether combined with orphanhood or not. Mrs Reed's reprimand to Jane actually allows for a general understanding of children as neophytes. The fact that she complains about Jane not being "childlike" enough, together with the different qualities she enumerates as distinguishing childhood both show how

children are expected to conform to the model of the Lockean subject, very similar to the liminal individual as defined by Turner: they should be *tabulae rasae* on which not only ideas but also social norms and regulations are to be engraved. In this sense, any deviation on Jane's part from the Victorian ideal of childhood can be interpreted as the neophyte rebelling against her master which therefore delays – if not destroys – the possibility of Jane's incorporation.

Indeed, when the heightened emotional volatility of the liminal hotspot (Greco and Stenner 160) makes Jane revolt against *Master* Reed's abuse and bullying and pronounce him to be "like a murderer", "like a slave-driver", "like the Roman emperors" (13), revolution – understood as a "'no' to the pre-existing order" – ensues.[69] By speaking up Jane is transgressing her condition as neophyte in as much as she is shown as departing from the passivity and humbleness expected in "threshold people" who should "accept arbitrary punishment without complaint" (Turner *Ritual Process* 95). Moreover, Jane is also breaking gender boundaries by appropriating the "masculine freedom of expression" (MacPherson 18) and its connotations: "[m]anly speech" was "the outward sign of 'independence', since conformity in speech was the most telling indication of subservience or deference" (Tosh "Gentlemanly Politeness" 460).

Should Jane's transgression be overlooked by Mrs Reed in her role as surrogate representative of the status quo, the "regulated system of distinctions" that is essential to the maintenance of structure would become endangered. As keeper of the "in-group" it is Mrs Reed's duty to prevent the escalation of crisis that may result from a process of undifferentiation (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 102), and it is for this reason that Jane is locked in the red-room.

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[69] By rebelling against John Reed, Jane is staging a revolution against a representative of the patriarchal status quo, since, as he explains he is heir to the whole estate: "all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years" (12).

In spite of the uncanniness that Jane experiences in this chamber her revolutionary mood persists for a while and she is shown to put into words the conflicted nature of her position: "Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned? […] Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try and win any one's favour?" (16).[70] Jane's young age prevents her from understanding the permanent status reversal that her full incorporation may cause through the loss of cultural distinctions which Mrs Reed is trying to prevent. Nonetheless, her reflection shows the tight connection between social and affective liminality: in Jane's case, her social liminality is first and foremost perceived as a state of destitution and dependence. This destitution in turn projects a constant feeling of uprootedness that foreshadows how Jane's successful reintegration into structure, as happens with Lucy Snowe, needs to resolve both the psychological and the social aspects of the liminal hotspot. With the passing of time, adult Jane can express in a more nuanced way her situation at Gateshead:

> I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage […] They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing […] a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgement. I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child – though equally dependent and friendless – Mrs Reed would have endured my presence more complacently; her children would have entertained for me more of the cordiality of fellow-feeling; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scapegoat of the nursery. (17)

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[70] Walter Kauffmann explains how "the world is divided into two: the children of light and the children of darkness, the sheep and the goats, the elect and the damned" (13).

Writing from an adult perspective, Jane seems to understand that her non-belonging at the Reeds' did not derive so much from her material destitution, but rather from her non-commitment to the Victorian middle-class ideal of childhood. It is her deviation from the Turnerian performative rituals of everyday life that makes her polluting in the eyes of the representatives of the status quo, thus preventing her being treated as an equal and relegating her to the "back regions" where "suppressed facts" are thought to belong (Goffman 114).[71]

Jane's incarceration in the red-room, a back region, combines features that belong to rites of purification and funerary rituals, and, as such, has a highly ritualistic quality. On the one hand, Jane's seclusion is the hardest physical ordeal that she has so far endured in her position as neophyte who has to be broken down and whose essence needs to be tempered to become a *tabula rasa* (Turner *Ritual Process* 103), a task that Mrs Reed assumes as mistress of ceremonies. On the other hand, the fact that Mrs Reed wishes Jane dead (Brontë 230) positions the child as sacrificial victim, thus evidencing the link between neophytes and scapegoats: it is because Jane is a liminal individual who does not belong to structure, and in fact threatens its stability, that she is considered "'sacrificeable' victim" (Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 4).

> The red-room was a spare chamber, very seldom slept in […] yet it was one of the
> largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars
> of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in
> the centre, the two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down, were half
> shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the carpet was red; the table at the
> foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth; the walls were of a soft fawn

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[71] Once she is freed from the red-room Jane is shown to be relegated to the company of the servants since Mrs Reed thinks the girl "is not worthy of notice" and tells her children not to associate with her (29).

colour, with a blush of pink in it […] Out of these deep surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed […] Scarcely less prominent was an ample cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it, and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne. (15)

The uncanniness that pervades Jane's description of the red-room is partly due to her child's perspective, for whom large furniture necessarily looks "massive". However, the Gothic undertones of the passage are strengthened when she discloses "the spell which kept [the room] so lonely in spite of its grandeur", namely that "it was in this chamber [Mr Reed] breathed his last […] and, since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion" (16). Thus the red-room can be read as a threshold space between life and death and the Gothic elements of the passage displace all sense of domesticity as represented in many Victorian realist novels.[72]

Departing from traditional feminist readings of this passage, an anthropological approach highlights Jane's position as sacrificial victim due to her liminal attributes and the fact that she does not belong to structure. Moreover, this excerpt evidences the importance of secular rituals in the Brontës' novels and how they are intended to substitute for traditional rites of passage: while some feminist critics have interpreted this passage as representative of Jane's biological coming-out, that is, her menarche, due to the profusion of red objects and the phallic quality of the "massive pillars" (Showalter *A Literature of their Own* 94, 95), my reading brings forward Jane's liminality and the ritualistic undertones of this scene of "sacred violence" while still attesting to the omnipresence of patriarchal symbols and their relation to power.

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[72] See Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* for an analysis of domesticity in the Victorian novel.

The mention of the "tabernacle" is key to an understanding of the red-room as a place of sacred sacrifice, thereby reinforcing the novel's engagement with secular rituals. Through this biblical allusion, this "stately" chamber is being compared to the structure that God ordered the Children of Israel to build in His honour.[73] The tabernacle is a space where consecrations are performed in the form of sacrifices, that is, it is a place where "violence and the sacred" merge. Being so, the red-room is endowed with the characteristics of a secular tabernacle where "dreary consecration[s]" still take place, and in this instance, Jane is forced to assume the role of sacrificial victim. The many allusions to red objects strengthen the connection with blood and fire, both of which usually have a primary function in religious and secular sacrificial rites and tend to be considered cleansing and therefore purifying. Moreover, the presence of red curtains and pillars runs parallel to the tabernacle as depicted in the Bible. Also, the fact that these pillars and curtains surround the bed – the central piece of furniture in a bedroom – which "rose high, and glared white" from the centre of the chamber makes it stand apart and gives the object the solemn relevance proper to an altar – the bed is indeed the precise place where the master died. In addition, Jane's comparison of the "ample cushioned easy-chair" to a "throne" adds to the stately quality of the late patriarch's chamber by metaphorically making it fit for a king, which evidences the late Mr Reed's power as representative of patriarchy, and strengthens the biblical metaphor by positioning Mr Reed as the king in whose honour sacrifices will be performed.

Secluded in a space of such a ritualistic nature, Jane is made to represent the novice whose metaphorical sacrifice will maintain social order by eliminating the outsider who may trigger a process of undifferentiation, that is, her sacrifice is aimed

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[73] See Exodus 27-31.

at purifying her and the society that is currently threatened by her presence. That is why Jane is shown to be "[t]hrown like some sacrificial virgin into the mausoleum of the dead patriarch" (Buzard 210, 211). Indeed, because Mr Reed was the one who introduced Jane to the household, and therefore, her intentional master of ceremonies, Jane's incarceration also bears a resemblance to the sati, a sacrificial practice common in India during the nineteenth century which consisted in burning alive the widow in her late husband's funerary pyre.[74] In this case, however, Mrs Reed displaces the role of sacrificial victim onto Mr Reed's novice, thus contravening her late husband's explicit wishes.[75] By excluding and punishing Jane then, Mrs Reed is not only shown to be conducting a rite of purification in the interest of maintaining "a regulated system of distinctions", but she is also empowering herself over Mr Reed.

In spite of the difficulty of Jane's position in the red-room, she is shown to be still trying to come to terms with the emotional overheat derived from her struggle with John Reed, and for a while remains insensitive to the menacing environment.

> my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth [the looking-glass] revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit […] Superstition was with me at that moment: but it was not yet her hour for complete victory: my blood was still warm; the mood of the revolted slave was still bracing me with its bitter vigour. (16)

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[74] For an analysis of the parallels between the Indian sati and Victorian women see Gilmartin.

[75] Mrs Reed tells how her husband had always shown a preference for Jane's mother and, upon her death, for baby Jane: "an hour before he died, he bound me by vow to keep the creature" (230).

The in-betweenness of the red-room is reduplicated when Jane looks at it from another threshold point. In this case the mirror not only splits Jane's self but also the space and time around her, thus occasioning time, space, and subjectivity to become affected. Building on Thomassen's model about the three dimensions of liminality ("Uses and Meanings" 16-18), we can see how Jane's self becomes split through an "individualized ritual" (17) that takes place in a threshold space. The reflection in the glass subdues the fire that threatens to consume Jane by offering a "colder and darker" version of the chamber and displaces the symbolism from the room onto Jane, whose "blood was still warm". Jane is thus shown to blend in with the environment – she not only absorbs the warmth but is also shown to function as bridge between reality and the supernatural, time past and present, when she sees herself as "a real spirit" and realises that her grief may lure the dead:

> I began to recall what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed; and I thought Mr Reed's spirit harassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode [...] and rise before me in this chamber. I wiped my tears and hushed my sobs, fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face, bending over me with strange pity. This idea, consolatory in theory, I felt would be terrible if realized. (18)

As the Gothic quality of the passage increases so do the three dimensions of liminality become more explicitly interrelated, showing how the Gothic, as in *Wuthering Heights*, proves an especially suitable genre to convey the psychological disruption that a liminal hotspot can cause. Jane's feeling of dread becomes more acute when she thinks of the red-room as a meeting point between life and death, a

metaphor that culminates with her passing out and which enacts an instance of "death and rebirth" (Van Gennep 182). It is through this state of unconsciousness that time, space, and subjectivity become not just condensed but suspended for Jane. Moreover, this instance also shows how "moments of heightened feeling […] are associated with uncertain agency" (Cohn 5) for the female protagonist of developmental narratives.

However, far from being subdued by the ordeal in the red-room Jane is shown to insist on starting a revolution against the status quo when she speaks thus to Mrs Reed:

> *Speak* I must: I had been trodden on severely, and *must* turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence – 'I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved *you*; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed: and this book about the Liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I.' […] 'I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if anybody asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty'. (38)

This passage shows Jane trying to make the most of the potentiality offered by the liminal stage by ignoring the social norms that regulate structure (Van Gennep 114). However, although this scene has been traditionally celebrated by critics as showing Jane moving "from silence to speech, thus providing a model of feminist resistance and liberation" (Kaplan 6), the dual nature of liminality and its potential to create

chaos are shown not to liberate Jane but rather to extend her liminal stage.[76] While Jane is shown to use the potentiality that for Turner seems to make the liminal stage a locus of "limitless freedom" (Thomassen "Thinking with Liminality" 56), her revolution against the "pre-existing order" only causes further displacement for the protagonist because it shows the neophyte as an imminent threat to the "status system" (Turner *Ritual Process* 106), thus removing the possibility of incorporation and extending the heroine's suspended transition.

Precisely because Jane's words represent a total deviation from the ideal of childhood (Bazin 32), Mrs Reed tries to avoid the status reversal that Jane threatens to bring on the household by disposing of her. By deciding to send the girl to Lowood, the keeper of the "in-group" precludes the possibility of any future revolutionary stances that may endanger the "regulated system of distinctions" essential to structure and enacts the final rite of purification for the community by means of Jane's metaphorical sacrifice. Thus, Jane's resistance needs to be understood as the primary cause for her remaining "stuck in liminality" (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22), a position that extends for most of the novel and which will afford Jane the possibility of becoming reincorporated into structure on her own terms, showing how suspended transitions are the making of the Brontës' heroines and therefore the stage where development-as-maturation takes place.

Without bidding good-bye to Mrs Reed or her cousins, Jane cries "'Good-bye to Gateshead'" and leaves her first place of abode without further ceremony (43). Jane's territorial passage between Gateshead and Lowood therefore lacks all the preliminary rites of separation that are expected to be performed when an individual

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[76] See Thomassen and Szakolczai for an extended analysis of the dangers of liminality.

who belongs to social structure starts for a journey.[77] The passage itself, an in-between stage of non-belonging where the individual is suspended between the stages of separation and incorporation, is shown to condense the dimensions of time and space for Jane: "I remember but little of the journey; I only know that the day seemed to me of a preternatural length, and that we appeared to travel over hundreds of miles of road" (44). Lost in time and space, Jane's account of her territorial passage reinforces its in-between quality. In fact, it takes some time for the girl to come to terms with the feelings of "sustained uncertainty, ambivalence, and tension" characteristic of the liminal hotspot (Stenner et al. 141, 142): "I hardly yet knew where I was. Gateshead and my past life seemed floated away to an immeasurable distance. The present was vague and strange, and of the future I could form no conjecture" (51). Here we see Jane portrayed as the liminal individual who can see no way out, a depiction that contradicts Thomassen's argument that one of the main differences between liminal individuals and liminal societies is that while the former "are themselves aware of the liminal state: they know that they will leave it sooner or later, and have 'ceremony masters' to guide them through the rituals", for the latter "the future is inherently unknown (as opposed to the initiand whose personal liminality is still framed by the continued existence of his home society, waiting for his re-integration)" ("Uses and Meanings" 21, 22).[78]

Lowood stands apart from the other settings in the novel because it shows Jane in contact with other fellow neophytes. The bleakness of the place, the explicit criticism of some representatives of religion, embodied here in the character of Mr

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[77] The Brontës' novels show liminars coming and going without any special preparation, Jane Eyre's and Heathcliff's flights from and returns to Thornfield and Wuthering Heights respectively are prime examples of how Brontëan liminars do not follow traditional patterns surrounding territorial passages.
[78] An argument which nonetheless contradicts his earlier statement that "[i]n liminality there is no certainty concerning the outcome" (5), which proves to be the case with the liminal experiences portrayed in the Brontës' novels.

Brocklehurst, and the importance of Miss Temple and Helen Burns in Jane's development have received much critical attention. Nonetheless, the Lowood chapters also form a tale of 'first times'. Surrounded by other liminars for the first time in the novel, Jane's experience in this setting can be best approached through Turner's concept of communitas: a community of neophytes who stand in a relationship marked by equality (*Ritual Process* 96, 97), something which Jane had never previously experienced and which gives her the opportunity of making her first friend and being heard for the first time.

Soon after Jane's arrival, she describes the other novices as "a congregation of girls of every age […] uniformly dressed in brown stuff frocks of quaint fashion, and long holland pinafores" (49). On a closer inspection she states

> a quaint assemblage they appeared, all with plain locks combed from their faces, not a curl visible; in brown dresses, made high, and surrounded by a narrow tucker about the throat, with little pockets of holland […] tied in front of their frocks […] all, too, wearing woollen stockings and country-made shoes, fastened with brass buckles […] it suited them ill, and gave an air of oddity even to the prettiest. (49)

On the one hand, the "uniformity, structural invisibility and anonymity" (Turner *Ritual to Theatre* 26) forced upon neophytes tends to facilitate the development of "an intense comradeship and egalitarianism" among them (*Ritual Process* 95). On the other hand, however, these novices are under the orders of an inadequate master of ceremonies – Mr Brocklehurst – whose disregard for the neophytes' transition makes them submit to all the hardships and humiliations proper to this threshold period without ever granting them a new, fixed status in the social order. The neophytes at Lowood are usually described as "[r]anged on benches" (49), forming into line (46), "marshalled" and marching to orders shouted at them and timed by the

sound of an "indefatigable bell" (47), and are alluded to as "stalwart soldiers" (63), which shows the school to be structured along military lines. Furthermore, the comradeship that is expected to arise among neophytes is at points compromised by the fact that there is a clear power imbalance between senior neophytes – the "stronger", "great girls" (50, 62) – and the younger ones.

Exposed to physical ordeals as they all are, Jane notes how the older girls usually take advantage of the little ones for the sake of survival: "from [the] deficiency of nourishment resulted an abuse which pressed hardly on the younger pupils: whenever the famished great girls had an opportunity they would coax or menace the little ones out of their portion" (62). Similarly, "the little ones" are denied a place by the fire after Sundays' "dreary" expeditions during the "wintry season": "each hearth in the schoolroom was immediately surrounded by a double row of great girls, and behind them the younger children crouched in groups, wrapping their starved arms in their pinafores" (62, 63). Mr Brocklehurst's inadequacy as master of ceremonies has given way to a situation similar to the one observed at Wuthering Heights and discussed in Chapter 1. Because of his negligence as "ritual elder" (Turner *Ritual Process* 96), the novices are shown to have adopted an 'every girl for herself' strategy which distorts the notion of communitas as conceptualized by Turner and instead depicts a model of *hierarchical communitas* which marks Lowood as a liminal setting where structure, as imposed by Mr Brocklehurst, and antistructure, where the neophytes belong, meet, collide, and merge showing how the "co-existence of anarchical and structural factors" (Georgsen and Thomassen 204) can appear in liminal settings. Because of this hierarchy among neophytes, it will be some time before Jane can state that "[she]

was well received by [her] fellow-pupils; treated as an equal by those of [her] own age, and not molested by any" (70).

The clearly defined institutional and structural aspects of Lowood are controlled by Mr Brocklehurst who, in his firm determination to maintain a "regulated system of distinctions", acts the role of master of ceremonies and explains how

> [his] plan in bringing up [the] girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying […] when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into [the] children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls! […] [He has] a Master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: [his] mission is to mortify in [the] girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel. (65, 66)

By attempting to break down the neophytes on the grounds of religion, Mr Brocklehurst is shown to endorse the widespread Victorian belief that "individual salvation [is] only to be won by active struggle" (Davidoff and Hall 25). This struggle was especially hard on women who, as Eve's daughters, were thought to require special constraints to avoid the Fall that their condition as polluted and polluting individuals seemed to make them prone to.[79] In this sense, the novices' experience at Lowood is made harsher on account of their gender, which points to the existence of differences between female and male liminality.[80] Moreover, Mr Brocklehurst's allusions to the different "lusts of the [female] flesh" he is willing to mortify show the female body as a locus for ritual, and, more specifically, for

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[79] For a discussion about gender and religion in Victorian society see Davidoff and Hall, and Poovey.
[80] Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, for example, portrays the hardships endured by orphans at the Victorian workhouse. However, these ordeals are accounted for in economic terms, with no specific allusion to gender.

purifying rituals. By understanding the female body as proxy for the soul, Mr Brocklehurst's intended purge aims at cleansing the girls' souls, stained by original sin. However, Mr Brocklehurst's rationale soon falls apart when his wife and daughters appear:

> three other visitors, ladies, now entered the room. They ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress, for they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs. The two younger of the trio (fine girls of sixteen and seventeen) had gray beaver hats, then in fashion, shaded with ostrich plumes, and from under the brim of this graceful headdress fell a profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled; the elder lady was enveloped in a costly velvet shawl, trimmed with ermine, and she wore a false front of French curls. (66-67)

The character of Mr Brocklehurst has traditionally been studied from the perspective of religion and patriarchy and he has been interpreted as the "personification of the Victorian superego" (Gilbert and Gubar 343). Additionally, an analysis of this character through theories about liminality shows Mr Brocklehurst's interest in maintaining the novices in a state of suspended transition, which positions him as trickster. This reading provides a different insight into Mr Brocklehurst in as much as it evidences his inadequacy as master of ceremonies by showing how his interest in maintaining "a regulated system of distinctions" follows the dynamics of scapegoating.

Considered one of the main archetypal figures in myth,[81] the trickster is a blocking figure whose main function is to prevent the hero's or heroine's success, that is, the trickster represents an obstacle to the expected happy ending. Building on the mythical and literary nature of this figure, different theorists have identified a

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[81] See Frye and Jung for an extended analysis.

trickster figure in liminality: although Turner makes a passing reference to the trickster, Horváth is the first theorist to fully develop the figure of the trickster in liminal cases applied to politics, and Thomassen and Szakolczai have also studied the concept in the context of liminal settings.[82] These theorists have identified the trickster as an outsider who benefits from the uncertainty and suspended transition that a community in a liminal stage undergoes and who, therefore, is not interested in their return to structure.

The girls at Lowood can be seen as forming a community where both structure and antistructure meet due to the presence of *hierarchical communitas*: a group of liminars forced to submit to impositions from an outsider who has a fixed point in the normative social order but who is not an appropriate master of ceremonies. Since the different ordeals that these novices undergo are mainly dictated and directed by Mr Brocklehurst, whose aim seems to be that the neophytes become worthy of transitioning into heaven upon death, he first appears as assuming the role of master of ceremonies. However, given the hypocrisy behind his rationale, made obvious by the appearance of his family, and taking into account that, presumably, the more the novices are mortified through neglect, the larger Mr Brocklehurst's benefits in his role as "treasurer and manager of the establishment" (52),[83] it can be concluded that far from being an appropriate master of ceremonies, the character of Mr Brocklehurst can be read as the trickster figure who profits from other individuals' suspended transitions. This fact suggests the impossibility of Jane's incorporation into social structure in this setting.

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[82] See Horváth; Horváth and Thomassen; and Szakolczai "Permanent (Trickster) Liminality".

[83] Being a Charitable Institution, Lowood is maintained to a large extent "by subscription" from "[d]ifferent benevolent-minded ladies and gentlemen" (52).

Moreover, one of Mr Brocklehurst's chief aims in running Lowood as he does is to keep the system of differences that will make the novices' liminal attributes prevail by imposing uniformity and marking them as social outcasts:

My second daughter […] went with her mamma to visit the school, and on her return she exclaimed, 'Oh, dear papa, how quiet and plain all the girls at Lowood look […] they are almost like poor people's children! and,' said she, 'they looked at my dress and mamma's, as if they had never seen a silk gown before' […] 'Consistency, madam, is the first of Christian duties, and it has been observed in every arrangement connected with the establishment of Lowood: plain fare, simple attire, unsophisticated accommodations, hardy and active habits. (36)

Mr Brocklehurst's unquestionable 'consistency' of character translates into scarce portions of "burnt porridge" (48), frozen water in the pitchers (55), flogging (57), insufficient clothing, and physical exposure to cold, rain, and snow (62) for the neophytes, and "velvet, silk, and furs" (67) for his wife and daughters.

However, in spite of the forsaken state of the novices enforced by Mr Brocklehurst, which furthers their desperation and abuse, we can also perceive how Jane benefits from the edifying experience of communitas through the small matriarchal world she partakes of. This shows how if the weight of emotional destitution is lessened, the anxiety produced by social dislocation can be momentarily obliterated:

We feasted that evening as on nectar and ambrosia; and not the least delight of the entertainment was the smile of gratification with which our hostess regarded us […] Tea over and the tray removed, she again summoned us to the fire; we sat one on each side of her, and now a conversation followed between her and Helen, which it was indeed a privilege to be admitted to hear. (74)

The relation between Jane, Helen Burns, and Miss Temple shows a true community of equals – Jane and Helen – who are guided by an appropriate mistress of ceremonies – Miss Temple. It is thanks to them that Jane learns that female resistance through silence may be more productive than open defiance in as much as it does not block the possibility of incorporation.[84] First, Helen Burns's stoicism is closer to martyrdom than to self-restraint and she stands out as the main Christ-like figure in the novel, which positions her as stuck in permanent liminality: the only incorporation Helen aims for is incorporation into Heaven for "[she] live[s] in calm, looking to the end" (61). Together with Helen's humbleness, Miss Temple's superior knowledge, sense of justice, and encouragement "by precept and example" (63) reconcile Jane to her role as neophyte and she is shown to understand the need for controlling the emotional turmoil associated with the liminal hotspot. In fact, when Jane is singled out as polluting by Mr Brocklehurst she has already learnt to play the scapegoat:

> '[I]t becomes my duty to warn you that this girl, who might be one of God's own lambs, is a little castaway – not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example – if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse' […] There I was, then, mounted aloft: I, who had said I could not bear the shame of standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy. What my sensations were, no language can describe; but, just as they all rose, stifling my breath and constricting my throat, a girl came up and passed me: in passing she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them! […] It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a

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[84] Feminist ethnographer Lila Abu-Lughod has observed in her research about Bedouin women how silence is a potent weapon for resistance in the private sphere (43).

slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit. I mastered the rising hysteria,

lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool. (68, 69)

By marking Jane as disposable, Mr Brocklehurst is shown to be following the same dynamics that operated at Gateshead, which stress the relation between marginalization and liminality. However, in this instance, his encouragement to exclude Jane problematizes the functioning of the communitas, since structure in the form of hierarchy is being imported from normative social order, which further highlights Mr Brocklehurst's lack of interest in the neophytes' assimilation. Nonetheless, Jane is shown to have acquired some understanding regarding her role as neophyte and her attitude "on the pedestal of infamy" is quite different from her reaction at the "tabernacle". On this occasion, she is not shown to yield to the emotional volatility caused by the staged sacrifice, but rather, she submits to the ordeal in the hope of future redemption.

However, Jane is just one of the many disposable individuals at Lowood and as a result of Mr Brocklehurst's neglect death plagues the school in the form of a typhus fever epidemic which makes the process of scapegoating complete: several novices need to be sacrificed to achieve a greater good for the community.

Inquiry was made into the origin of the scourge, and by degrees various facts came

out which extended public indignation in a high degree […] the discovery produced

a result mortifying to Mr Brocklehurst, but beneficial to the institution […] new

regulations were made; improvements in diet and clothing introduced; the funds of

the school were trusted to the management of a committee […] The school, thus

improved, became in time a truly useful and noble institution. (85)

The school then undergoes its own rite of purification, and due to the illness and death of several novices, the place is cleansed and metaphorically reborn for the benefit of the community of neophytes.

Nonetheless, in spite of the improvements achieved through sacrifice, the feeling of stagnation which can result from an extended period of liminality eventually makes Jane restless:

> My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had the courage to go forth into its expanse […] An age seemed to have elapsed since the day which brought me first to Lowood, and I had never quitted it since […] I had had no communication by letter, or message with the outer world. (86)

Jane's inability to stand enclosure and her desire to benefit from the potentiality offered by liminality make her stand in special contrast to Lucy Snowe, who is shown to regard closed spaces as granting safety and an escape from the conflictive nature of liminality.[85] In Jane's case, however, spatial constraint is shown to operate as a driver for change:

> School rules, school duties, school habits and notions, and voices, and faces, and phrases, and costumes, and preferences, and antipathies: such was what I knew of existence. And now I felt it was not enough […] I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer […] I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication. For change, stimulus […] 'Then,' I cried, half desperate, 'grant me at least a new servitude!'. (87)

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[85] See Chapter 4 for an extended analysis of Lucy Snowe's liminal stage.

The feeling of claustrophobia that is overwhelming Jane emerges from the text through the listing of repetitive school routines which is immediately followed by a prayer for liberty. Jane is shown to be ready to enact a "pattern shift" but the conflicted nature of the liminal hotspot makes it difficult for her to articulate it in specific terms. These conflicts that liminal hotspots may represent for the individual have been identified by Greco and Stenner as "an encounter with *paradox*" which has the potential of "*paralys*[*ing*] conduct to the extent that it confuses and interferes with the flows of experience and activity ordinarily channelled by, and into, the orthodox pattern" (155). After several years as a novice at Lowood, Jane is depicted as feeling the need for an escape out of that state of suspended transition that is shown to make her feel stagnated – a situation similar to William Crimsworth's at Bigben Close. Nonetheless, because uncertainty is one of the chief characteristics of the liminal stage, the protagonist is ambiguous in her formulations of "new forms-of-process" (Greco and Stenner 155). Moreover, in spite of Jane's longings to see the world, and to "surmount" the walls that enclose Lowood (87), what she eventually asks for is a new voyage *in*: "'[w]hat do I want? A new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances'" (88).

From the moment Jane decides to advertise as governess, through her appointment by Mrs Fairfax, and up to the point in the narrative when she actually arrives at Thornfield, the protagonist is shown to exist in "the interfacial region" where "the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything as it were, trembles in the balance" (Turner *Ritual to Theatre* 44): "I sat down and tried to rest. I could not […] I was too much excited. A phase of my life was closing to-night, a new one opening tomorrow: impossible to slumber in the interval; I must watch feverishly

while the change was being accomplished" (91). Jane is shown to articulate all the potentiality proper to moments of transition, an "interval" where the liminal entity can feel how time past, present, and future get condensed and nothing is definite. However, the dual nature of the liminal stage, and of potentiality, capable of evoking contradictory feelings such as "fear and courage, anxiety and hope, grief and joy" (Georgsen and Thomassen 206), gradually changes the tone of Jane's anticipation from the excitement about new prospects to feelings of uncertainty also proper to the "psychosocial experience" of liminality:

> It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world, cut adrift from every connexion, uncertain whether the port to which it is bound can be reached, and prevented by many impediments from returning to that it has quitted. The charm of adventure sweetens that sensation, the glow of pride warms it: but then the throb of fear disturbs it. (95)

Jane's description gives expression to the suspension she is currently undergoing. At a moment frozen in time, both her past and future are suspended, and the present harbours ambivalent emotions. The fact that these impressions are recorded during her territorial passage between Lowood and Thornfield highlights the uncertainty inherent in such transitions and further evidences the dual quality of liminality: while the subjective experience of time becomes suspended, physical progression is actually taking place. Moreover, the inner conflict that Jane is shown to go through between feeling the "charm of adventure" and the "throb of fear" is directly linked to "inexperienced youth". This inexperience is something that will also be deeply regretted by Lucy Snowe and condemned by Helen Graham, and which relates, not to youth in general, but to the female experience of liminality as shaped by Victorian gender ideology. Both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe are represented as neophytes who

have not been adequately prepared to face the several obstacles that lie between them and the possibility of their reassimilation, whereas William Crimsworth, for example, is shown to have a much more linear and certain progress, thus showing how the traditional, generic *Bildungsroman* can be problematic for the representation of female stories of maturation which, in the case of the Brontës' novels, invariably include episodes of suspended transitions.

Furthermore, although the change of settings in *Jane Eyre* has been interpreted as representative of a "voyage out" (Stoneman 34), Jane's arrival at Thornfield does not imply an opening of space for the protagonist – as is the case for William Crimsworth upon his arrival in Brussels – but rather brings further seclusion, a pattern also present in *Villette* and which I analyse in Chapter 4.

> [N]ow and then, when I took a walk by myself in the grounds; when I went down to the gates and looked through them along the road; or when […] I climbed the three staircases, raised the trapdoor of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim skyline […] I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen. (Brontë *Jane Eyre* 110)

No matter how "reassuring" (97) her introduction as the new governess at Thornfield is, and how cheerful and bright her room appears (99), Jane is now caged "in some Bluebeard's castle" (108): "I did not like re-entering Thornfield. To pass its threshold was to return to stagnation" (117). Jane's feeling of stagnation is characteristic of suspended transitions and results from the interaction between social and affective liminality. When the protagonist is shown to desire "more of practical experience than [she] possesse[s]; more of intercourse with [her] kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within [her] reach" (111), she

is not just alluding to her social displacement, but also to her affective dislocation. Not only is Jane an outcast with no defined position in the social order, she is also emotionally uprooted, alone, without family or kin, hence her longing for "more of intercourse with [her] kind". In fact, at this point in the narrative, Jane's articulation of her emotional liminality can be read as related to her coming-out.

Jane's arrival at Thornfield marks the protagonist's "separation from the asexual world" and "incorporation into the world of sexuality" (Van Gennep 67). Jane's social coming-out is facilitated by a 'voyage in'. As an inhabitant of this "Bluebeard's castle" that the heroine considers Thornfield to be, Jane's sense of womanhood comes to the fore even before she meets Rochester, thus showing how the setting works also as a proxy for its owner.

> I dressed myself with care: obliged to be plain […] It was not my habit to be disregardful of appearance, or careless of the impression I made; on the contrary, I ever wished to look as well as I could, and to please as much as my want of beauty would permit. I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer […] I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked. And why had I these aspirations and these regrets? It would be difficult to say: I could not then distinctly say it to myself; yet I had a reason, and a logical, natural reason too. (100)

For the first time in the novel, Jane is shown to feel self-conscious about her physical appearance although she cannot say why. In entering Thornfield, Jane has been admitted into a world rich in psychosexual energy: not only will she have her first *tête-à-tête* with a man, but she will also be exposed to tales of promiscuity, and adultery. Thus, the sexuality inherent in the setting of Thornfield awakens Jane's

own eroticism and she will not only desire for "more of intercourse with [her] kind", but will explicitly ask for "incident, life, fire, [and] feeling":

> the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it – and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which while it swelled it to trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended [...] quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. (111)

Jane's transition into womanhood makes explicit her latent sexuality in a passage that can be read as a metaphorical instance of masturbation and which at the same time shows how overt female sexuality at Thornfield is confined to the margins due to its threatening nature. On the one hand, the fact that Jane's restless nature agitates her to a state of pain which can only be relieved by walking "backwards and forwards" can be interpreted as a representation of sexual desire that needs to be physically satisfied through "exultant movement". Moreover, by allowing her mind to dwell on "bright" and "glowing" fantasies Jane can be seen as encouraging and achieving climax, a moment of pleasure that causes her heart to heave, swell, and expand, all of them actions that can be used to describe sexual intercourse, and which can also refer to the muscular contraction and relaxation of the vagina. Furthermore, the allusion to Jane's "inward ear" can be read as a metaphor for the female sexual organs "quickened" by the heroine's fantasies and her desire for "incident, life, fire, [and] feeling". This, I argue, represents the staging of Jane's coming-out and again places the female body as a locus for ritual.

Nonetheless, Jane's progression towards sexual fulfilment positions the protagonist dangerously close to the figures of the lunatic and the fallen woman as represented mainly by Bertha Mason, but also by Céline Varens; thus evidencing how female sexual desire was not considered natural and therefore not accepted as customary. First, Jane goes off to the "corridor of the third story" to give way to her most intimate desires. However, far from being "safe" and solitary, this is the space where unrestrained female sexuality is punished and constrained, as Bertha's imprisonment proves. Whereas male sexuality is normalized and therefore belongs to the centre – Rochester's confessions about his profligacy start in the dining-room (131) – female sexuality is shown to be marginalized, othered, and relegated to the periphery both of the house and of England – neither Bertha Mason nor Céline Varens are English. [86] Moreover, all the passages related to Bertha, the most explicitly sexual female character in the novel, are shown to belong to the realm of the Gothic, thus stylistically endowing female sexuality with seemingly inherent uncanny and preternatural characteristics. When Jane accesses the "third story", she is also articulating the "story" that is not told because it needs to be hidden, and transgresses the "system of cultural distinctions" between public and private, and male and female by giving expression to a tale of "incident, life, fire, [and] feeling" which Rochester will be later shown to monopolize for most of the Thornfield chapters. Thus, Jane is shown to enact a power struggle based on contemporary gender discourses even before she meets Rochester. Moreover, Gothic and realist conventions also merge and collide when Jane is shown to occupy the same space as

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[86] As Buzard notes, Charlotte Brontë invests in identifying Englishness rather than Britishness: "Brontë's specification of non-English British identities as markers of 'Englishness' […] reflects the expansive sense of English identity gaining currency over the first half of the nineteenth-century" (f.n. 2, 180).

Bertha as the empowered "I" who narrates from the margin what should not be spoken.

In fact, Jane's movements "backwards and forwards" anticipate the scene where the protagonist finally sees Bertha Mason for the first time and describes "a figure [running] backwards and forwards" (291). The character of Bertha Mason has traditionally been considered Jane's active alter-ego, the entity who actually performs what Jane can only desire or imagine (Gilbert and Gubar 360-362). However, Bertha is the one who mirrors Jane's actions, that is, it is Jane who takes the initiative and Bertha who mimics her. The fact that Jane can be argued to anticipate Bertha in this instance counters Victorian anthropological theories about race, nation, and hierarchy, challenging the dichotomy between primitive and civilised populations. Moreover, the fact that this potential deconstruction of contemporary anthropological discourses takes place at Thornfield, the estate of a landed gentleman whose fortune comes partly from the colonies, and which therefore acts as a proxy for the Empire, further complicates the traditional understanding proposed by Gilbert and Gubar, among others, who see in *Jane Eyre* a traditional imperialistic discourse.

Understanding the third story as the peripheral space where female sexuality, irrespective of class, race, or nation, belongs can provide a new depth to critical readings of Jane's feminist manifesto.

> It is vain to say that human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action […] Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel […] they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute an stagnation, precisely as men would suffer […] It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at

them, if they seek to do more and learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex (111).

The celebrated passage has traditionally been considered Charlotte Brontë's pronouncement on the Woman Question and has been read in social terms.[87] However, I suggest that in challenging women's alienated position, Brontë is doing so from a more comprehensive perspective than has been generally acknowledged. Taking into account that this excerpt comes immediately after Jane's metaphorical masturbation, is pronounced in the third story and answered by Bertha's laugh, together with the priority given to women's capacity to feel may allow a reading that sees this manifesto as challenging women's position in an integral way that also refers to sexuality. That is, Jane Eyre is here shown to be trying to deconstruct the system of differences that regulates normative society from all possible angles and in so doing she is portraying herself as a stronger threat to the status quo than any of the other characters.

The shift in pronouns that had taken place at Gateshead is here reversed: Jane's longings are followed by a vindication of women's rights, thus enacting a change from "I" to "we". However, by allying with women in general in a passage embedded in-between expressions of female sexuality, Jane, though still ignorant of their existence, is shown to come close to the "French opera-girl" (146) and the colonial "maniac" (291), thus validating the dangers believed to be posed by the

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[87] Mary Poovey, for example, explains that the underlying message is that "women's dependence was customary, not natural, that their sphere was kept separate only by artificial means, and that women like men, could grow through work outside the home" (147).

figure of the governess and its link with the lunatic and the fallen woman (Poovey 129).[88]

Although Jane's appointment at Thornfield projects an illusion of stability – she considers her existence as endowed with "privileges of security and ease" (117) – the nature of her "new servitude" implies additional social and affective displacement because "no one knows exactly how to treat [the governess]" (Sewell 412):[89] that is, the governess is a figure who traditionally occupies the position of "included *as* excluded". By making Jane become a governess, a figure considered "a threat to the 'natural' order" (Poovey 143) and marked by status incongruity, the author places the protagonist in a psychosocial limbo which further complicates the possibility of escaping liminality.[90] The in-betweenness and split identity inherent in the position of governess, together with the representation of Jane's latent sexuality, problematize her liminal stage in as much as these attributes help to represent the heroine as a more dangerous threat to the status quo than her representation in previous settings did. It is at this point that I consider Jane's liminal stage to be "sufficiently elaborated" to become "reduplicated" (Van Gennep 11). Her vague and contradictory position as governess, together with her increasing emotional destitution, complicate the "psychosocial experience" of the liminal hotspot and portray Jane as "stuck in liminality" due to the extended suspension of her transition into structure.

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[88] For an analysis of the figure of the governess and the Governess' Plight during the Victorian period see Poovey, Peterson, and Davidoff and Hall. For contemporary commentaries about the Victorian governess see Sewell and Rigby.

[89] Reynolds and Humble consider Jane's governessing as enacting a "trope of liminality" (123), however, as I have been arguing, liminality pervades Jane's story from the very beginning.

[90] I see Jane's appointment as governess as a means to an end, a plot line that aims at problematizing the heroine's social position by adding to the character more attributes that render her a threat to social order. Thus, *Jane Eyre* displaces the Governess's Plight – as opposed to Anne's *Agnes Grey* – to focus on the more general issue of the Woman Question.

In fact, Rochester's early behaviour towards Jane attests to her social dislocation and the confusion surrounding the figure of the governess: "'Miss Eyre, I beg your pardon. The fact is, once and for all, I don't wish to treat you like an inferior: that is (correcting himself), I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years' difference in age and a century's advance in experience'" (134). The incongruity and in-betweenness of Jane's position as governess, marked by her "being formally invited in, but implicitly cast out" (Kofoed and Stenner 177), is clearly perceived and verbalized by Rochester, who does not know "how to treat her". However, although "to gentlemen [the governess] was a 'tabooed woman'" (Poovey 128), Rochester's increasing interest in Jane prepares the path for a potential collapse of differences.

The fact that Jane is at this point in the novel a novice who has just entered the world of sexuality displaces the story of the governess in favour of a romantic plot line between the heroine and Rochester. This plot in itself constitutes a threat to the status quo in as much as it shows Rochester ignoring the conventions expected from the gentleman employer towards the governess, and challenging contemporary notions of propriety. In fact, the interaction between both characters represents a series of power struggles that give way to "status reversals" through "*rituals of status elevation*" [emphasis in the original] (Turner *Ritual Process* 167):

> 'When I was as old as you, I was a feeling fellow enough […] but fortune has knocked me about since […] and now I flatter myself I am hard and tough as an indiarubber ball [sic]; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump. Yes: does that leave hope for me?' […]
>
> '[…] how could I tell whether he was capable of being retransformed?
>
> 'You look very much puzzled, Miss Eyre […]'. (133)

When Rochester chooses Jane as "confidante" he can see the strangeness of his choice (144). In sharing with Jane the details of his profligate youth and telling her about his uneasy conscience, Rochester is 'elevating' the novice to the position of mistress of ceremonies. These rites of "status elevation" usually imply that "[t]he high must submit to being humbled [and] the humble are exalted through the privilege of plain speaking" (Turner *Ritual Process* 179). By reversing the pattern master-novice, Rochester is shown to be willingly submitting to Jane's "plain speaking" to become cleansed: "'I know what sort of a mind I have placed in communication with my own: I know it is one not liable to take infection: it is a peculiar mind: it is a unique one'" (Brontë 144). During this rite of "status elevation" Rochester becomes the polluting neophyte, and Jane is positioned as the "ritual elder" who may lead the liminar out of the threshold stage. This is a ritual which also echoes the contemporary belief that the female mind works as the keeper of morality in the Victorian household.

Nonetheless, Jane and Rochester's relation is marked by recurrent instances of power struggles and Rochester quickly goes from neophyte to master of ceremonies: "'You have no right to preach to me, you neophyte, that have not passed the porch of life, and are absolutely unacquainted with its mysteries'" (137). Furthermore, it is easy to see how Rochester perceives Jane to be a novice in the world of sexuality:

> 'The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother – or father, or master, or what you will – to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly […] I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of

bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there;

were it but free, it would soar cloud-high'. (139, 140)

These instances represent status reversals which show Rochester's alternate positions trusting the novice as spiritual guide at one point and reproaching her lack of experience at another. In the same way, Jane is also depicted as mastering Rochester:

I knew the pleasure of vexing and soothing him by turns; it was one I chiefly delighted in, and a sure instinct always prevented me from going too far; beyond the verge of provocation I never ventured; on the extreme brink I liked well to try my skill. Retaining every minute form of respect, every propriety of my station, I could still meet him in argument without fear or uneasy restraint; this suited both him and me. (157)

In her intermittent role as mistress of ceremonies, Jane feels empowered when she can meet Rochester "on the extreme brink", a metaphorical threshold that strengthens the egalitarian quality of the protagonists' relation dynamics, and which shows the liberating aspect of liminality and the potentiality it affords. Moreover, as a result of these power struggles and status reversals, Jane is shown to be under an illusion of emotional assimilation due to the levelling she experiences between Rochester and herself. As the feeling of uprootedness loses force, the need for social reincorporation is displaced in as much as Jane feels she belongs with Rochester, a pattern similar to the one observed in *Wuthering Heights* between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, and which is also key to Lucy Snowe's experience of liminality in *Villette*. Once the neophyte feels at home with someone else, social liminality, not having a fixed point in structure, is represented as becoming secondary, thus evidencing the importance of the emotional aspect of the "psychosocial experience" of the liminal hotspot:

The confidence he had thought to repose in me seemed a tribute to my discretion: I

regarded and accepted it as such […] when summoned by formal invitation to his

presence, I was honoured by a cordiality of reception that made me feel I really

possessed the power to amuse him, and that these evening conferences were sought

as much for his pleasure as for my benefit […] I had a keen delight in receiving the

new ideas he offered, in imagining the new pictures he portrayed and following him

in thought through the new regions he disclosed […] I felt at times as if he were my

relation rather than my master […] So happy, so gratified did I become with this

new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred: my thin-crescent

destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of my existence were filled up; my bodily

health improved; I gathered flesh and strength. (147)

The levelling shown to take place between Jane and Rochester has been celebrated

by critics for its egalitarian quality (Gilbert and Gubar 352).[91] I suggest that an

analysis of the relation between both protagonists through theories of liminality

evidences the similarity in Jane and Rochester's positions from a different

perspective: the equality that transpires from this apparent relation between master

and neophyte can be understood as fitting the model of "spontaneous communitas"

(Turner *Ritual Process* 132; *Ritual to Theatre* 47), a model that Turner identifies as

taking place when "compatible people – friends, congeners – obtain a flash of lucid

mutual understanding on the existential level", and he goes on to argue that "when

the mood, style, or 'fit' of spontaneous communitas is upon us, we place a high

value on personal honesty, openness, and lack of pretentions or pretentiousness"

(*Ritual to Theatre* 48). Thus, the central part of the novel is devoted not to "desire as

want or need" (Boumelha 20), but to experiences of suspended transitions. What this

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[91] These critics explain how "though in one sense Jane and Rochester begin their relationship as
master and servant […] in another they begin as spiritual equals" (352).

also means, however, is that Jane and Rochester can be seen as equals because, far from being an appropriate master of ceremonies, Rochester is also a neophyte in liminality. Therefore, in spite of Jane's sense of progress and emotional stability, her suspended transition cannot be resolved by Rochester.

Although Rochester has a seemingly fixed place in the social structure, his first conversation with Jane already hints at the process of penance he is undergoing when he asks if there is hope for him (133). Penance and atonement are liminal stages: they represent the transition from a state of sin to re-gained innocence and purity. The spiritual equality that Gilbert and Gubar have observed between both characters and which, as I suggest, can be understood as an instance of "spontaneous communitas" is to a great extent founded on the confessional tone of Rochester's interventions:

> 'I am a trite, commonplace sinner, hackneyed in all the poor petty dissipations with which the rich and worthless try to put on life […] You would say, I should have been superior to circumstances; so I should – so I should; but you see I was not […] I degenerated. Now when any vicious simpleton excites my disgust by his paltry ribaldry, I cannot flatter myself that I am better than he: I am forced to confess that he and I are on a level. I wish I had stood firm – God knows I do! […] remorse is the poison of life'. (137)

When Rochester is portrayed as remorseful for his past sins, the so-called spiritual equality between him and Jane becomes problematized. On the one hand, Jane can be considered Rochester's superior in morality, since as he is shown to acknowledge, her mind is unpolluted. On the other hand, Rochester is above Jane in socio-economic terms, although as he states, his corrupted morals make him no better than any other man. In this sense, Rochester's confessions may be understood as the

preliminary rite to the ritual of purification that may lead him out of liminality. What makes both characters truly equal, therefore, is the liminality that both are shown to experience, and it is the desire to escape it that prompts the "spontaneous communitas" and the status reversals that make the former possible.

Rochester's in-betweenness is the result of his unfortunate marriage to Bertha Mason, a union that belongs to the periphery – they get married in Spanish Town – and is concealed from everyone in England. As a married man who disowns and alienates his wife keeping her secluded under his roof, Rochester and, by extension, Bertha Mason, are placed in liminality:

> 'I daresay you have many a time inclined your ear to gossip about the mysterious lunatic kept [at Thornfield] under watch and ward […] I now inform you that she is my wife […] Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! […] You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with someone at least human'. (290)

The complexity of the nature of Rochester's "psychosocial experience" of liminality needs to be unpacked paying attention to the interaction between different types of liminality: he is represented as trapped in an unwanted marriage, which results in both social and affective liminality. From a social point of view, he is legally married but behaves as a single man who hides his marital status from everyone. Rochester has blurred the boundaries between the two distinct stages that singleness and marriage represent, becoming suspended in an in-between state. As regards the emotional plane, the affective liminality derived from the feeling of entrapment in the "bottomless pit" he considers his marriage to be (305) leads Rochester to "degenerate" in trying to find a way out. He becomes desperate to find a proper

companion but instead "trie[s] the companionship of mistresses" (308), which results in the feeling of remorse he discloses from the beginning. It is for these reasons that in spite of the status reversals that take place between Jane and Rochester there is no possibility of their overcoming liminality together due to the different nature of the circumstances that are shown to have suspended each character's transition. In fact, when Jane saves Rochester from the "tongues of flame dart[ing] round [his] bed" (149), she is actually interrupting a potential rite of purification.

Notwithstanding the apparent similarities between Jane and Rochester's liminal positions, their differences in social status need to be accounted for. It is for that reason that a possible union between both characters is perceived as a threat to the "regulated system of distinctions" essential to maintain normative social order and is therefore neutralised by several representatives of the status quo. As regards Jane, the "spontaneous communitas" that is established with Rochester soothes her affective volatility because it displaces the feeling of exclusion: "And was Mr Rochester now ugly in my eyes? No, reader: gratitude and many associations, all pleasurable and genial, made his face the object I best liked to see; his presence in a room was more cheering than the brightest fire" (148). It is not until Jane hears about Blanche Ingram's accomplishments that she measures herself against a "lady of rank" (161), someone who occupies an unambiguous place within the social structure, and can perceive the differences between herself as novice, and someone who, according to custom, may have a rightful claim on Rochester:

> '*You*,' I said, 'a favourite with Mr Rochester? *You* gifted with the power of pleasing him? *You* of importance to him in any way? Go! your folly sickens me. And you have derived pleasure from occasional tokens of preference – equivocal tokens shown by a gentleman of family and a man of the world to a dependant and a novice

[…] It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which […] if discovered and responded to, must lead *ignis-fatuus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication. Listen, then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence: to-morrow, place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity, write under it, "Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain" […] is it likely [Mr Rochester] would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?'. (160, 161)

It is thus that Jane is shown to go over her liminal attributes and become aware of the collapse of differences that a union with Rochester would mean. First, in referring to herself, we can see how her liminal stage has been reduplicated due to her condition as governess: Jane not only describes herself as "a dependant and a novice", attributes she has had from the beginning of the novel, but in giving a title to her portrait the word "governess" comes first, even before the adjectives "disconnected, poor, and plain", thus giving special relevance to the social displacement that her position implies. Moreover, the equality that had been observed between Rochester and Jane is here checked as well when she refers to him as "her superior", which extrapolates the implications of her reflection to refer to marriage across class in general. It is on this point that she acknowledges the crisis that may ensue from disturbing the system of differences through marriage, since this type of union "must lead *ignis-fatuus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication", thus showing how, in this case, her social dislocation is an obstacle to her being able to surmount affective liminality.

However, as the rebellious neophyte she has proved so far to be, Jane, as author of her own biography, keeps challenging the social order. Thanks to the

potentiality inherent in her role as neophyte, she gains a power of vision from the margins that allows her to see without being seen, much as Lucy Snowe will be shown to do from her "watch-tower" (C. Brontë *Villette* 75). In Jane's case, the protagonist can observe the representatives of the status quo at leisure: Jane pries at the party from threshold spaces without being noticed by anyone: "I could see without being seen" (165), "I sit in the shade […] the window-curtain half hides me" (173), "I slipped out of the room, unobserved by any eye" (194). The empowerment resulting from her position of "included *as* excluded" gives her the chance to conclude:

> '[Mr Rochester] is not to them what he is to me,' I thought: 'he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine – I am sure he is – I feel akin to him – I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him […] I know I must conceal my sentiments: I must smother hope; I must remember that he cannot care much for me […] I must, then, repeat continually that we are forever sundered – and yet, while I breathe and think, I must love him'. (174)

Jane's desire to overcome her emotional dislocation, her feeling of being "alone in the world", is what leads her to disregard custom and lay a claim on Rochester on purely spiritual terms:

> 'Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you through the medium of custom, conventionalities, not even of mortal flesh: it is my

spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are!'. (251)

In addressing Rochester as a fellow neophyte, a member of the "spontaneous communitas" they have been shown to share, Jane thinks she is disregarding "the medium of custom [and] conventionalities" necessary to the maintenance of normative social order. The presumed transgression represented by Jane's speech on this occasion is similar to her feminist manifesto since both passages aim at displacing the "cultural divisions" necessary to maintain structure but which, at the same time, is the initial cause of Jane's suspended transition.

In spite of the risk that these transgressions represent from a social point of view, Rochester's desire to escape his own liminality leads him to start the period of betrothal, a preliminary rite and transitional stage that is placed in the central chapters of the novel while the successful marriage ritual that the couple eventually undergo at the end of the narrative is completely peripheral and marginal. Like all transitional states the period of engagement is full of potentiality, and, given the dual nature of liminality, this can also be understood as a stage characterised by "the quality of 'both/and' *and* 'neither/nor'" (Kofoed and Stenner 169) which gives way to multiple, contradictory emotions. In fact, Jane is shown to be immersed in the "interfacial region" that is characteristic of in-between stages: "[t]he feeling the announcement sent through me was something stronger than was consistent with joy – something that smote and stunned: it was, I think, almost fear" (256). The ambivalence of Jane's feelings can be understood as resulting from the "affective volatility" usually generated by extended suspensions, rather than as a foreshadowing of the truncated wedding. Although marrying Rochester would presumably put an end to Jane's liminality – both social and emotional – by giving

her a fixed, defined place in social structure shared with someone who can fulfil her affective needs, she is shown to challenge the customary rites pertaining to the period of betrothal.

In fact, when Jane refuses Rochester's wedding presents because "[she] will not be [his] English Céline Varens" and insists on "continu[ing] to act as Adèle's governess" to "earn [her] board and lodging" (268) she assumes what may be seen as quite a paradoxical position: by wanting to establish a clear distinction between herself and Rochester's earlier mistresses, Jane is shown to be aware of the importance of the system of differences she nonetheless threatens to destroy. Jane's immovable views, however, not only anticipate her refusal to be Rochester's mistress, but differ from the Girardian system of differences in that they are not based on custom and designed to maintain the status quo but are founded on moral principles. This is the reason why when Mrs Fairfax advices Jane to "[t]ry and keep Mr Rochester at a distance" because "[g]entlemen of his station are not *accustomed* to marry their governesses" [my emphasis] (264), Jane does not understand that she is being warned against provoking a collapse of differences that may lead to crisis.

Jane's feeling of in-betweenness reaches its climax on the day before the wedding when her subjectivity is shown to become split:

> Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not […] Mrs Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow […] and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive before I assigned to her all that property. It was enough that in yonder closet, opposite my dressing-table, garments said to be hers had already displaced my black stuff Lowood frock and straw bonnet. (273)

At this point in the story the subjective process of transition between stages is narrated in a detailed way. Not only is there a shift in pronouns, this time from "I" to

"she" referring to the same person, but Jane also refers to her married self as not yet born and unknown to her. By capturing the transition between two different states of being, Jane is shown to inhabit the realm of "indeterminacy" where both her subjectivity and time become condensed (Turner *Ritual to Theatre* 44). Moreover, when she sees her reflection in the mirror already wearing her bridal garments she fails to recognise herself: "I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger" (285). Whereas the looking-glass in the red-room had also revealed "a strange little figure" (16), on this occasion Jane's reflection in the mirror is at the same time an echo of Bertha's own image, who on the previous night anticipated the appearance of a ragged bride wearing something "white and straight" and with features that Jane describes as "fearful and ghastly" (281). Bertha's apparition then should thus be taken as the last warning against a marriage that would collapse any difference between Jane and Bertha, but which, on the other hand, if not celebrated would cause Jane's transition to remain suspended.

It is precisely in this state of transition marked by indeterminacy that Jane will be forced to remain when the ceremony – and therefore the process of undifferentiation and the ensuing state of crisis – is stopped by the solicitor Mr Briggs in his role as surrogate representative of the structural order that needs to be maintained.

> [W]here was the Jane Eyre of yesterday? – where was her life? – where were her prospects? Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent expectant woman – *almost a bride* – was a cold solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate. A Christmas frost had come at midsummer; a white December storm had whirled over June […] My hopes were all dead – struck with a subtle doom, such as, in one night, fell on all the first born in the land of Egypt [my emphasis]. (293)

Jane's transition is interrupted and remains pending, in a state of total indeterminacy. "[A]lmost a bride", Jane is shown to be suspended between her past self to which she cannot return – "where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday?" – and a future self she does not yet know but whose prospects look "desolate" and "dead". However, in preventing "Jane Rochester" from being born, the system of differences that regulates and maintains social order remains intact. In fact, because "she thought all was fair and legal, and never dreamt she was going to be entrapped with a defrauded wretch" (290), Jane's regression to childhood, to her past "cold solitary" life, leaves the protagonist in a state which is compared to that of "all the first born in the land of Egypt". Through this biblical allusion Jane's fate is likened to all the innocent first-borns who were massacred as part of the Plagues of Egypt.[92] This analogy not only reinforces Jane's innocence, but also represents her as sacrificial victim: by suspending her transition into matrimony, and therefore, her social assimilation, Jane remains "stuck in liminality" but is spared the sinful and immoral position that entering a relationship marked by bigamy would entail. In spite of the conflicted nature of the liminal hotspot and the indeterminacy that Jane phrases in a desperate "[w]hat am I to do?" (295) as she had once asked "[w]hat do I want?" (88), she is shown to remain faithful to her principles which, although they entail further displacement, are the only means for her to avoid becoming Rochester's "English Céline Varens":

> '*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained [sic] I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man […] Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation: they are

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[92] The Plagues were a divine punishment against the Pharaoh due to his refusal to free the Israelites. The tenth and final Plague killed all the first-borns in Egypt sparing only those born of Israelites who had marked their doors with lamb's blood. See Exodus 11.1-12.36.

for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour […] Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations are all I have at this hour to stand by; there I plant my foot'. (314)

Jane's refusal to become Rochester's mistress after the failed wedding not only complicates her social and emotional transition, but also represents an unsuccessful rite of passage for Rochester, who had seen a union to Jane as an escape from his affective liminality and a rite of purification:

> 'That is *my wife* […] And *this* is what I wished to have […] this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon. I wanted her just as a change after that fierce ragout […] Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask – this form with that bulk'. (292)

However, Rochester's idea of purification through Jane would only lead to her moral corruption, making her no different from Bertha Mason (as she is perceived in the novel). Moreover, as a novice, Jane is not in a position to guide another neophyte out of liminality, and she can only "advise [Rochester] to live sinless" and "die tranquil" before leaving him to atone on his own (313).

The process of undifferentiation that is allowed at Thornfield through status reversals between neophytes and the blurring of social barriers between governess and male employer, though not completed, is enough to lead to the most excruciating crises in both Rochester's and Jane's lives, thus keeping their transitions suspended. As regards Rochester, he is finally purified through a baptism by fire which leaves visible traces of his original sin:

'he went up to the attics when all was burning above and below, and got the servants out of the beds and helped them down himself, and went back to get his mad wife out of her cell. And then they called out to him that she was on the roof […] I witnessed, and several more witnessed, Mr Rochester ascend through the skylight on to the roof […] We saw him approach her; and then, ma'am, she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement […] there was a great crash – all fell. He was taken from under the ruins […] one eye was knocked out, and one hand so crushed that Mr Carter, the surgeon, had to amputate it directly […] He is now helpless, indeed – blind, and a cripple'. (423, 424)

Narrated in the tone of a biblical story, Rochester is shown to have walked through hell to regain his right to live at peace on earth. The opposition between "above and below" nonetheless maintains the secular nature of the ritual while at the same time giving it a more apocalyptic quality: it is the sky that seems to catch fire, and Rochester ascends not to heaven but to hell. However, the great fire at Thornfield gives Rochester the opportunity to atone for the wrongs he had committed earlier in his life, and is in fact started by a woman, as representative of the sex he sinned against. Once cleansed by the fire he is left "blind, and a cripple" lest he should forget his past sinful life. Through this rite of purification, Rochester has partially overcome his liminal stage in as much as he has done his penance and is now a widower.

As regards Jane's crisis, once she leaves Thornfield she is shown to exist in a "limbo of statuslessness": "What was I?" (318). This existential vacuum she is shown to go through is the result of her extended "psychosocial experience" of the liminal hotspot, which positions Jane in a state similar to death:

> [n]ot a tie holds me to human society at this moment – not a charm or hope calls me where my fellow-creatures are – none that saw me would have a kind thought or wish for me. I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose. (319)

At this point in the story Jane's dislocation is complete. Moreover, she is shown to be aware of how close she is to the figure of the fallen woman, the Victorian social outcast *par excellence*: "I wish no eye to see me now: strangers would wonder what I am doing, lingering here at the signpost, evidently objectless and lost. I might be questioned: I could give no answer but that would sound incredible and excite suspicion" (319). It is due to Jane's total destitution that I consider her liminal stage to become reduplicated once more. In fact, Jane's three-day wandering in no-man's-land stages an instance of "death and rebirth". Jane's own Via Crucis will lead her to "Whitcross", "a stone pillar set up where four roads meet" (319), that is, a crossroads, a landmark with ritual connotations since it was the place traditionally chosen to bury people who had committed suicide. Jane's constant insistence on challenging and trying to subvert custom, which turns her into a threat to social order, can be read as a metaphorical suicide of sorts since it is that behavioural pattern which has made her transition suspended and, therefore, has prevented her from being reborn to social order.

Jane's staged death and resurrection – she collapses and spends "three days and nights" in a state of semi-consciousness (335) – take place in Marsh End, the setting that sees her return "to the realm of society" (Gilead "Liminality and Antiliminality" 309), and, more importantly, her assimilation into social structure. Although she enters Moor House under the alias of "Jane Elliott" (333), the new master of ceremonies that appears in Jane's rite of passage is able to reconcile her

with her past and give her the connexions she longed for. Once St John Rivers discovers Jane's true identity, she is provided with a "home", "brothers [and] sisters" (383), and a fortune (378). By enacting a "home-coming" (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 17) it is at this point that Jane's social liminality comes to an end since she achieves "a clearly defined" position in social structure, and leaves behind the stage where the individual exists in an unknown and unfamiliar environment with no identity, material property, or visibility (Turner *Ritual Process* 94, 95).[93] Moreover, in finding true affect in the Rivers' family, her emotional liminality is also minimized.

However, Jane's incorporation into society does not prevent her from keeping up her fight against custom. On the contrary, now that she is "an independent woman" (429) she can start her revolutions from the centre. It is this independence, I suggest, and the fact that she has got rid of the potential to become a sacrificial victim that enable her to refuse St John's marriage proposal (403-409) and enact a "pattern shift" (Greco and Stenner 155) that makes her go back to Rochester even if she does not know about Bertha's death. That is, she resolves to put a complete end to her affective liminality, a move that has been read by some feminist critics as undermining the proto-feminist tone of the novel.[94] Nonetheless, the actual successful rites of passage in connection to Rochester – their wedding and the birth of their son – are completely marginalized from a narrative point of view. Moreover, in going to Ferndean, although also considered a step-back for Jane by some critics because it is a secluded and isolated place, I argue that the heroine is actually enacting her very first voyage-out, since this is the territorial passage that leads her

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[93] It has been recently argued that Jane never escapes liminality because she remains in her characteristic otherworldly state (see Clark). This argument, however, lacks an anthropological foundation.

[94] See for example Politi.

to make the most of her independence and womanhood through the promise of sexual fulfilment and mental expansion.

CHAPTER 3

"'Nothing persuaded her but her own sense of duty'": conflicting duties and the liminal hotspot in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

When Helen Graham returns to Grassdale Manor to nurse her abusive, profligate husband on his deathbed, Gilbert Markham cannot understand her decision and Helen's brother simply says: "'[n]othing persuaded her but her own sense of duty'" (422). And this is enough explanation for Gilbert, who has already been acquainted with Helen for some time. In fact, one of the main implications of the relevance of the heroine's "sense of duty" is that it is the driver of Helen's rite of passage and the cause of her suspended transition. Whereas Jane Eyre's reluctance to abide by social customs extends the heroine's suspension, as discussed in Chapter 2, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Anne Brontë shows the opposite:[95] trying to live up to social expectations causes a struggle between conflicting duties that eventually leaves Helen out of social structure when she finds herself caught in-between different "forms-of-process" – stages in a rite of passage – as wife and mother, a state that for Greco and Stenner is characteristic of the liminal hotspot (147).

Studying the heroine's development from the point of view of theories about liminality shows how traditional Victorian rites such as coming out or marriage can actually imply displacement for the woman due to the inequality between male and female initiands at the level of experience – a fact also highlighted in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Villette*. Moreover, unpacking the Victorian ideal of womanhood and splitting it into the roles of wife and mother shows Helen positioned in a state of in-betweenness, primarily caused by the inadequacy of

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[95] Hereafter *The Tenant*.

available masculine models,[96] that leaves her no other option but to enact one of the strongest transgressions narrated in any of the Brontës' novels when she, as a rebellious neophyte, decides to leave her husband and fake widowhood, a "pattern shift" which takes her out of social structure and reduplicates her liminal stage, thus extending the experience of the liminal hotspot initially triggered by the collapse of differences that takes place at Grassdale Manor.

The Tenant grants the opportunity of following the heroine's complete rite of passage since at the start of her narrative Helen has a fixed point in the social order, thus making the text come closer in structure to the traditional *Bildungsroman* which sees the hero departing from his home in search for fulfilment and maturity. Nonetheless, as is usual with Brontëan characters, when we first meet the protagonist she is already a liminar who has left behind a "clearly defined 'structural'" position (Turner *Ritual Process* 95). Due to the novel's layered narrative structure, readers' expectations are challenged since, by prioritising the representation of Helen's liminality, the novel's structure alters the order observed in rites of passage (separation-liminality-reassimilation) and gives narratorial preference to the liminal stage, which evidences the importance of suspended transitions in *The Tenant*.

This chapter also provides a reading of the representation of ritual in key passages in the novel that portray the different communities Helen enters into contact with to better illustrate the importance and meaningfulness of secular rituals versus traditional rites of passage. By means of close-reading I also unpack the paradox faced by the heroine: Helen's efforts to meet the ideal supported by representatives of the status quo eventually position her out of social structure and endow the heroine with the attributes of a scapegoat. Once she is shown to occupy the role of

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[96] For an analysis of masculinities in Anne Brontë, see Jacobs, Joshi, McMaster, and Pike.

"included *as* excluded" (Kofoed and Stenner 176) as mistress of Grassdale Manor Helen's transition into the angelic influential figure is suspended and the heroine is trapped in an in-between state that finally triggers a "pattern shift" which, far from incorporating her back into social structure, extends Helen's liminal stage. Through the protagonist's transitions in between "forms-of-process", I show how *The Tenant* represents liminality as a dual stage which can imply freedom and constraint at the same time: it is thanks to her suspended transition that Helen ultimately becomes an independent woman, an interpretation that departs from previous approaches to the novel in seeking to explore the liberating aspect of the heroine's struggles and how her defiance is not limited to her decision to leave her husband.

While previous criticism of the novel has tended to focus either on Helen's relation to the angelic ideal, Gilbert Markham's rite of passage, or the existence of competing models of masculinity, my study of the ritual process in the novel highlights the extent to which Anne Brontë's fiction, like that of her sisters, ignores the representation of conventional rites of passage (associated with the *Bildungsroman*) to explore instead the unexpected potential afforded to the heroine by her liminality. Reading *The Tenant* through the lens of anthropological work on the ritual process, I show that, contrary to the model of development afforded by the *Bildungsroman*, it is the suspended transitions which are the most critical for the woman who will become a Brontë heroine. Indeed, I show how thanks to liminality Helen Lawrence evolves into Helen Huntingdon to finally become Helen Graham, an independent, self-supporting woman and mother who is able to bring up "a fine young man" (486) on her own.

In fact, the three Helens represented in the novel run parallel to the three stages observed by Van Gennep in rites of passage. While the character of Helen

Lawrence is shown to adhere to social norms and undergoes the rite of coming out which separates her from her previous status, Helen Huntingdon's new position in society, which implies the roles of bride, wife, and mother, turns out to produce dislocation due to her perception of duty and the conflict she faces, and Helen Graham, who starts as a liminar, finally enacts a return to social structure. This feminine trinity that the heroine impersonates as she transitions between different circles of activity implies a constant re-negotiation of roles in between the Virgin-like figure, the Angel in the House, and the fallen woman. The conflict arising from Helen's notion of duty as 'daughter', mother, and 'holy spirit' (in her role as Arthur's redeemer) not only suspends her transition, thus causing the liminal hotspot she becomes trapped into; the different stages also give way to the stylistic in-betweenness of the novel: each of Helen's stages presents distinct features characteristic of different literary genres or sub-genres and are introduced in various narrative styles. That is, "the hybrid nature of the novel's textual identity in turn has a correlate in the heroine's personal identity" (Frawley 120), which shows how narratives about suspended transitions may also challenge structural homogeneity.

To begin with the first of the three Helens, through the representation of Helen Lawrence, Anne Brontë challenges the Victorian literary tradition of the absent mother:[97] since her "dear mamma died when [she] was a very little girl" and her father gave up Helen's care, she always "look[s] upon [her] uncle and aunt as [her] guardians" (175). That is, although half-orphaned, Helen is shown to be properly cared for both physically and morally – in contrast to Jane Eyre, whose soul was being salvaged through the mortification of the flesh (65, 66) – thus displacing the common plot according to which the fictional Victorian mother or female

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[97] See Dever and Bilston.

surrogate is either absent or inadequate as a means to produce more interesting plots for the adolescent heroine (Bilston 32), as is the case in Emily's and Charlotte's novels. In fact, Anne Brontë's heroines offer this contrast to her sisters': both Agnes Grey and Helen Lawrence have proper maternal guides who offer sensible advice and have strong moral and religious convictions, thus emphasizing Anne's preoccupation with the role of inadequate fathers.[98]

Although the role of Helen's aunt and uncle has received little attention in literary criticism, these characters, specially Mrs Maxwell, are at the core of the heroine's strong – albeit arguably wrong – sense of duty and moral rectitude, and, as such, have implications in Helen's rite of passage: they represent the point of origin and destination in the protagonist's process of maturation. Nonetheless, the fact that Mr and Mrs Maxwell are marginal characters in spite of symbolising the home one returns to when overcoming liminality (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 17) is in keeping with the emphasis that the Brontë sisters give to the liminal stage and periods of suspended transitions in their novels.

> 'Keep a guard over your eyes and ears as the inlets of your heart, and over your lips as the outlet, lest they betray you in a moment of unwariness. Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention, till you have ascertained and duly considered the worth of the aspirant; and let your attentions be consequent upon approbation alone. First study; then approve; then love'. (132)

With this speech Mrs Maxwell tries to prepare Helen for the marriage proposals to be expected after her rite of coming out in the so-called London season: the first rite of initiation that the heroine is shown to undergo in the novel. Helen's presentation in society – which Mr Maxwell calls the "first campaign" (133) – initiates her as

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[98] See Pike for an extended analysis about representations of fatherhood in Anne Brontë's novels.

marriageable, and therefore marks the beginning of her adult life, which she refers to as her "career" (133). This secular and performative rite of passage so common among the Victorian middle and upper classes is absent from all the other Brontës' novels, and its presence in *The Tenant* serves the aim of evidencing its dangers for the female initiate – which is in keeping with the treatment of traditional rites of passage in the sisters' adult prose.

On the one hand, Mrs Maxwell tirelessly warns Helen about the dangers of youthful infatuation in what actually comprises a foretelling of her niece's future:

> 'some, through carelessness, have been the wretched victims of deceit; and some, through weakness, have fallen into snares and temptations too terrible to relate […] If you should marry the handsomest, and most accomplished and superficially agreeable man in the world, you little know the misery that would overwhelm you, if, after all, you should find him to be a worthless reprobate, or even an impracticable fool'. (132)

Through this piece of advice Helen's aunt is also shown to question the Victorian expectations of marriage and domesticity in as much as she does not seem to believe in a woman's capacity to reform "a worthless reprobate, or even an impracticable fool", but rather foresees a life of overwhelming "misery" for the wife. Moreover, in referring to "the wretched victims" who, through "carelessness" – a potential reference to the figure of the inadequate mother – or "weakness" "have fallen into snares and temptations too terrible to relate", Mrs Maxwell acknowledges the possibly dangerous outcomes of the rites of coming out and marriage for girls. By alluding to female victims of male vice, Mrs Maxwell not only casts doubt on the feasibility of the angelic ideal, but implicitly alludes to the gender and power dynamics of marriage by depicting the woman as being at the mercy of the husband.

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Thus, far from being a state that facilitates the experience of "communitas" observed between Jane Eyre and Rochester, as discussed in Chapter 2, Victorian marriage implies female subservience to the master of ceremonies, which therefore positions the woman in a liminal stage. Furthermore, what Mrs Maxwell is doing in watching over Helen's rite of coming out is assuming the position of "ritual elder" (Turner *Ritual Process* 96) to try and ensure the heroine's successful outcome.

On the other hand, however, and in spite of Mrs Maxwell's efforts to guide Helen, the heroine's incipient attachment to Arthur Huntingdon, forged during the London season, offers a depiction of Helen Lawrence as proto-sensational heroine which is reminiscent of other Brontëan female rebellious protagonists such as Jane Eyre, or Catherine Earnshaw and Catherine Linton:

> I cannot express my joy – I find it very difficult to conceal it from my aunt; but I don't wish to trouble her with my feelings till I know whether I ought to indulge them or not. If I find it my absolute duty to suppress them, they shall trouble no one but myself; and if I can really feel myself justified in indulging this attachment, *I can dare anything, even the anger and grief of my best friend* [my emphasis]. (153)

Helen Lawrence is here shown to be experiencing "the struggles of conflicting dut[ies]" (474): her duty to her aunt, and the inclination of her own feelings, which at the same time echoes her believed duty to Arthur. Brought up in a religious environment, with guardians who have watched over her morality, the neophyte is nonetheless portrayed as ready to defy her elders' teachings and wishes to save Arthur Huntingdon, thus showing how despite her aunt's advice the ideal of the Angel in the House is too deeply rooted in Helen to dismiss it without first-hand experience. In fact, it is Helen's belief in the role of women as guardians of morality

and their potential for the reformation of others that will get her caught in a state of suspended transition during marriage.

> '[P]rovided he is not incorrigible […] the more I long to deliver him from his faults – to give him an opportunity of shaking off the adventitious evil got from contact with others worse than himself, and shining out in the unclouded light of his own genuine goodness – to do my utmost to help his better self against his worse, and make him what he would have been if he had not, from the beginning, had a bad, selfish, miserly father, who to gratify his own sordid passions, restricted him in the most innocent enjoyments of childhood and youth, and so disgusted him with every kind of restraint; – and a foolish mother who indulged him to the top of his bent, deceiving her husband for him, and doing her utmost to encourage those germs of folly and vice it was her duty to suppress […] they shall wrong him no more – his wife shall undo what his mother did!'. (176, 177)

In contrast to Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth, Thomas Hardy's Tess, and even Anne Brontë's Rosalie Murray (*Agnes Grey*), Helen's 'fall' can be understood as solely her fault since in accepting Arthur she is overtly defying her mistress of ceremonies' guidance, an attitude that contradicts Helen's own belief in her potential as redeemer and reformer, evident in her readiness to assume the role of mistress of ceremonies for her husband-to-be. In "long[ing] to deliver him from his faults" and wanting "to undo what his mother did", Helen is shown to believe she can reverse Arthur's process of maturation and make him a *tabula rasa* again through self-sacrifice, that is, she is already foreseeing her future role as scapegoat – to Mrs Maxwell's dismay, who "thought better of [Helen's] judgment" (177). Helen's blunt refusal of other mistresses of ceremonies is further evidenced when she states her conviction in the empowerment of the wife over the maternal figure: in marrying Arthur, Helen will

not only contravene her aunt's expectations, but apparently she will also erase the mark left by an inadequate mother. Helen, though still a neophyte who "[has] not passed the porch of life" (C. Brontë *Jane Eyre* 137), believes she can act as wife, mother, and redeemer to Arthur Huntingdon, an amalgamation of roles that would require Helen to be allowed to act as "Mediatrix between man and Christ", a lifelong in-between role which Protestantism even denied to the figure of the Virgin (*Virgin Mary* 5).

The rite of transition from Helen Lawrence to Helen Huntingdon is ignored in the narrative and no details about the ritual of matrimony emerge. Helen only records in her diary some instances of her vexation during the "wedding tour" (203), and bluntly introduces her new status in the following terms:

> I am married now, and settled down as Mrs. Huntingdon of Grassdale Manor. I have had eight weeks experience of matrimony. And do I regret the step I have taken? – No – though I must confess, in my secret heart, that Arthur is not what I thought him at first, and if I had known him in the beginning, as thoroughly as I do now, I probably never should have loved him, and if I loved him first, and then made the discovery, I fear I should have thought it my duty not to have married him. (202)

Only eight weeks into matrimony Helen Huntingdon reflects on what Helen Lawrence's duty would have been had she listened to her mistress of ceremonies, for, as she acknowledges, "everyone was willing enough to tell [her] about [Arthur], and he himself was no accomplished hypocrite, but [she] was wilfully blind" (202). However, the new status she has acquired through marriage forces the heroine to reassess the nature of her duty, and once she has entered this new "circle of activity"

(Greco and Stenner 150),[99] though "wilfully blind", she reckons that "[her] duty, now, is plainly to love [Arthur] and to cleave to him; and this just tallies with [her] inclination" (202). This new scenario displaces the proto-sensational traits in Helen Lawrence and brings forward a type of heroine more characteristic of Victorian domestic realism. In fact, Helen Huntingdon's readiness to "cleave to him" and to regenerate Arthur positions her close to the "later-born Theresas [who] were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul" (Eliot "Prelude" 3).

However, Helen's period as bride soon brings a clash between duties when she has her Victorian morality confronted by Arthur's Regency habits (McMaster 354).[100] The domestic bliss expected to spread especially easily in the country house is absent from Helen's daily life due to her husband's acquired vices and past mischiefs.[101] As a man used to the London club-life with no further interests than the enjoyment of the public, leisured, male sphere, Arthur easily gets tired "of the idle, quiet life he leads" in the country,[102] and Helen soon has occasion to wish "he had something to do, some useful trade, or profession, or employment – anything to occupy his head or his hands for a few hours a day, and give him something besides his own pleasure to think about" (225). That is, Helen wishes he was more Victorian.

Nonetheless, Arthur Huntingdon's reluctance to show any signs of what mid-nineteenth-century middle-class Victorians would consider respectable masculinity such as "industry", "work ethic", a desire for "personal advancement", and "self-

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[99] Greco and Stenner see rites of passage as "concern[ing] the management of transitions from circle of activity to circle of activity" (150).
[100] The noun "bride" can refer to "[a] woman at her marriage; a woman just about to be married or very recently married" ("Bride, n.1."). Helen refers to herself as "wife" once she becomes a mother (16).
[101] For the adequacy of the country house to become a harmonious household see Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.
[102] In her analysis about Victorian clubland, Black notes how "clubbable men are prone to ennui and boredom" (284).

discipline" is a way of displaying his own social status.[103] On the one hand, Arthur's leisured habits are more characteristic of "the dissident behaviour" common in eighteenth-century clubs (Capdeville par. 2) and which advances the "decadence", "extravagance […] indulgence and idleness" that would spread in late-Victorian clubland (Black 284). On the other hand, however, Arthur's behaviour, his "parasitic gentlemanliness" (Hyman 456), is a marker of his rank. Departing from any notions of productivity or industry considered key for those who wanted to ascend the social ladder, Arthur, who is depicted as belonging to an earlier system based on "tradition, blood, and privilege", prior to the notion of temperance, uses "aliment" as "a crucial sign of status: a clear means of displaying one's wealth" (Hyman 457).[104]

Unable to be industrious, in his desire to escape the boredom of domesticity Arthur's "favourite amusement is to […] tell [Helen] stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband" (209). Thus, while in *Jane Eyre* Rochester opens up about his past to seek relief from her pure mind (144), in what I consider a status reversal between master and neophyte,[105] Arthur Huntingdon is far from penitent and is shown to be abusing his power over Helen with the object of torturing her pious mind. In fact *The Tenant* reverses this plot-line in *Jane Eyre* for, while

> Rochester comes to see the wrongness of any human attempt to intercept Divine impulses and stifle them so as to prevent them from interfering with one's desires. The absence of that insight prevents the terrors suffered by the dying Arthur Huntingdon […] from representing the operations of conscience. (Thormählen *Brontës and Religion* 168)

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[103] See Tosh for an extended discussion of Victorian signs of manliness.

[104] Although Gwen Hyman endorses Deborah Lupton's assertion that alcohol is a liminal food (31), it is rather the state of drunkenness that can be considered a liminal experience.

[105] See Chapter 2 for an extended analysis of the power dynamics between Jane and Rochester.

Therefore, whereas Rochester progresses towards redemption through penitence without any direct influence from Jane, Arthur, on the contrary, is shown to complete his fall while married to Helen in spite of her efforts to redeem him due to his total lack of remorse.

What both Rochester's and Arthur's confessions have in common, however, is that they evidence the double standard which applies to female and male Victorian initiands. While both male protagonists meet their future wives having had previous experiences in affective relationships, Jane and Helen enter marriage as true novices. For this reason, both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant* show how gender has implications regarding certain rites of initiation, according to which the female neophytes are at a disadvantage due to contemporary social expectations derived from moral codes, a fact that has been largely disregarded by major theorists of the ritual process.

In fact, in spite of Arthur's contempt for Helen's sensibilities, he, in his capacity a master, wants to keep her a *tabula rasa*, as unpolluted and ignorant of the world as possible, and admits that "he did not wish [Helen] to be Londonized, and to lose [her] country freshness and originality by too much intercourse with the ladies of the world" (216). With this statement, Arthur is not only shown to highlight the traditional Victorian binary city-countryside,[106] but also brings to the fore the secular rites of the time when he refers to the process of being "Londonized". Thus London is presented as a site for rituals of initiation. If the London season works as the space where girls are introduced to society once they are considered marriageable – a rite especially relevant in Jane Austen's novels – Arthur's expression points to London as a site of the corruption of femininity through too much exposure to experience.

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[106] When Helen returns to Staningley after her "first campaign" (133) she also resents the change and feels "quite ashamed of [her] new-sprung distaste for country life" (130).

That is, London is the place where a female neophyte can evolve into a "lad[y] of the world" and this is precisely the transition that Arthur wants to avoid for Helen.

Unlike *Villette*, in which London is portrayed as a wild space, unmanageable for the female novice,[107] *The Tenant* offers a depiction of London as clubland, a male space on the threshold between respectability and transgression (Capdeville pars. 1, 10, 22), access to which should therefore be carefully restricted for women. In fact, on this occasion Helen resents the "round of restless dissipation" she experiences in the city (216). However, her sense of duty towards Arthur makes her subordinate her own inclinations to her husband's desires, which shows how the power dynamics in this relationship tend towards positioning and maintaining Helen as neophyte:

> [Arthur] seemed bent upon displaying me to his friends and acquaintances in particular, and the public in general, on every possible occasion and to the greatest possible advantage […] to please him, I had to violate my cherished predilections […] I must sparkle in costly jewels and deck myself out like a painted butterfly, just as I had, long since, determined I would never do. (217)

Helen's subjugation to Arthur's ways in London depicts her inability to come to terms with the city and its social rites: whereas the Manor is the domestic space where she feels entitled to disapprove of her husband's transgressions, London, which in *The Tenant* stands for a male, public territory, neutralizes her agency and will. In fact, Helen's self-sacrifice, which she understands to be her duty, shows an important contrast between this heroine and Jane Eyre. Whereas Jane is shown to enact the strategy of "austerity as resistance" (Puri 29) when she insists on being faithful to her sartorial preferences (C. Brontë *Jane Eyre* 257), Helen, on the other hand, submits to her husband and dismisses her "almost rooted principles in favour

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[107] See Chapter 4 for an analysis.

of a plain, dark, sober style of dress" (217), thus becoming objectified and unable to restrain Arthur's "restless dissipation". With this choice Helen is shown to occupy a liminal position resulting from the struggle between conflicting duties. Her desire "to please [Arthur]", which she regards as her wifely duty, makes her obliterate her principles and inclinations which can be regarded as her duty to herself. This conflict and the feeling of non-belonging soon make Helen "wearied of the throng and bustle, the restless hurry and ceaseless change of a life so alien to all [her] previous habits" (217). Helen's feeling of alienation not only helps represent her situation as outsider but also evidences her disapproval of the social rites which lead to becoming "Londonized" for they are a threat to domestic ideals.

Nonetheless, Arthur has long been a member of clubland, a social space which he favours over any other and is unable to keep it separated from the domestic, private space of the home. After staying in London for weeks on end "shut up within the walls of his own abominable club" he returns to the Manor "flushed and feverish, listless and languid, his beauty strangely diminished, his vigour and vivacity quite departed" (224).

The Tenant offers a telling example of the chaos that ensues from mixing ritualistic spaces that should be kept separate. During one of Arthur's friends' visits at the Manor, club and home are brought together causing a collapse of differences that distinctly leads to crisis. Although recent scholarship on clubland has reimaged the club as "a surrogate home" (Milne-Smith 796) which provides an "alternative domestic life for men" (798), [108] one of the distinct characteristics of clubs is precisely the absence of the female figure. Thus, this experience of "homosocial domesticity" that clubs offer (Milne-Smith 799) distorts the ideal of home that from

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[108] Barbara Black even refers to late nineteenth-century clubs as "a room of one's own" (283), and in fact, at one point in the novel Arthur says "I took him home – that is, to our club" (188).

the eighteenth-century has the figure of the woman at its centre. Clubs, then, become an escape from women's control, and therefore, women's influence. Nonetheless, clubs can be considered threshold spaces in between "private/public sphere dialectics" (Capdeville par. 22) in as much as they provide privacy, and a sense of belonging to a community of "chosen equals" (Capdeville par. 8), while at the same time allowing for practices which "were clearly considered unsuitable for ladies" (Capdeville par. 10) and therefore could never belong to the normative domestic space of the house.

Among the practices that men usually resorted to at clubs "immoderate drinking" after dinners was one of the commonest (Capdeville par. 14). At Grassdale Manor – as in most Victorian middle and upper-class households – dinner is immediately followed by gender segregation, but the ladies scarcely have the time to leave the dining-room on their way to the drawing-room – a domestic ritual that shows how within the household itself space is also gendered – when they can hear Arthur exclaim: "'Now then, my lads, what say you to a regular jollification?'" (270). It is when "loud bursts of laughter and incoherent songs, pealing through the triple doors of hall and ante-room" (273) reach the ladies, that the notions of club and home, male and female, public and private clash, collapse, and are distorted since one of the maxims of clubland is that it offers "men of leisure a homosocial space to gamble and drink *without sacrificing their respectability*" [my emphasis] (Pike 117).

Moreover, when the gentlemen finally join the ladies, we can see how clubland toxic masculinity disrupts "[t]he most feminine and most domestic of all occupations" (Braddon 239): the ritual of tea. With Mr Grimsby "pouring the cream into [his] saucer", adding six lumps of sugar "instead of [his] usual complement of

one", and spoiling the sugar-basin (275, 276) as a result of his intoxication, the novel meaningfully shows how mixing gendered rites, which belong to separate spheres, results in disruption and crisis. If tea "is consistently associated with an ideal [...] of hospitality, community, nourishment, and comfort, and an ideal vision of femininity to uphold all of those elements of home" (Fromer 23), *The Tenant* shows how the disruption of the ritual caused by the intervention of alien agents rules out all its meaningfulness and makes it ineffective. In fact, by upsetting the ritual of tea, which acts as proxy for the ideal of female domesticity, Helen is positioned as "disapproving outsider" (McMaster 357), and therefore, becomes an outcast relegated to the margins of the house while vice moves to the centre. So much so, that far from the comradeship shared among club members, or the ideal of community represented by tea, a series of violent uproars ensues which does away with all the "self-command" and "self-respect" of the men involved (279), and overwhelms their wives with feelings of "pure shame and humiliation" (278). It is thus that the collapse of differences brought on at Grassdale Manor transforms it into a threshold space where structural and anarchical factors are shown to co-exist, a combination which is characteristic of the liminal hotspot (Georgsen and Thomassen 204).

The process of undifferentiation at Grassdale Manor escalates and the collapse of spheres is made more and more obvious making the house "night after night one scene of riot, uproar, and confusion" (348, 349), to the point that even the notion of clubland is surpassed, and domestic realism is displaced by the Gothic. In spite of the liberties taken by club members, these spaces were nonetheless founded on "strict rules [...] supposed to guarantee moderation and social cohesion" (Capdeville par. 2). What develops at the Manor, however, is a scene more typical of

some Victorian public houses. This spatial collapse of differences brings the Manor close to Wuthering Heights and sets it apart from Thornfield Hall, where unrestrainable vice is secluded in the attic.

The escalation of vice and sin that takes place at the Manor also shows how the rite of marriage, and the expected submission of the wife to the husband, can pollute the female initiand, thus taking her away from the domestic ideal:

> since he and I are one, I so identify myself with him, that I feel his degradation, his failings, and transgressions as my own; I blush for him, I fear for him; I repent for him, weep, pray, and feel for him as for myself; but I cannot act for him; and hence, I must be and I am debased, contaminated by the union […] Things that formerly shocked and disgusted me now seem only natural […] I am gradually losing that instinctive horror and repulsion which was given me by nature, or instilled into me by the precepts and example of my aunt. (262)

Arthur's depravity has reversed "nature" and made the woman lose all her moral power, making her feel "debased" instead. This is due to the fact that male rites that should be kept separate from the female, private sphere of the home, because they belong to the club, have been forced upon the domestic space. Thus *The Tenant*, like *Wuthering Heights*, depicts a spatial collapse of differences that makes Grassdale Manor hover in between the home, the club, and the prison.

In spite of "the productive, rational, Godly order" (Hyman 459) that made Helen Lawrence resolute to undo Arthur's mother's over-indulgence and "shak[e] off the adventitious evil got from contact with others worse than himself" (176, 177), Helen Huntingdon initially falters and "ha[s] not the heart" to upbraid her husband "by word or look" (224) during his first episodes of excess:

I play and sing to him for hours together. I write his letters for him, and get him everything he wants; and sometimes I read to him, and sometimes I talk […] I know he does not deserve it; and I fear I am spoiling him; but this once, I will forgive him, freely and entirely – I will shame him into virtue if I can. (224)

While many Victorian novels insistently show that "a woman has no influence at all, beyond that which a husband or lover chooses to grant her" (Jansson 32), there is no other instance in the Brontës' fiction which depicts such an exercise of forbearance from a wife towards a vicious husband. The closest example is the marriage between Isabella Linton and Heathcliff, where Isabella, as Helen, marries Heathcliff "wilfully blind" and soon discovers she has volunteered for a life of brutality and abuse. However, it does not take long for Isabella to start retaliating, despising, and trying to break free from her husband. Helen Huntingdon, on the other hand, is shown to act as if she is not yet done with Arthur's faults.

If only for a brief moment, Helen forgets about duty for the sake of apparent stability. That is, the chaos that Arthur is creating by beginning to blur the separation between the public and the private spheres has led Helen to a state of "affective volatility" she needs to escape even if she is aware of the possible drawbacks (Greco and Stenner 160). In fact, when Helen says "[i]f ever I am a mother I will zealously strive against this *crime* of over indulgence" (226) she seems to be finally acknowledging the superior influence of the mother over the wife, thus finally realising that a wife cannot easily become a mistress of ceremonies for her husband, for, as Arthur reminds her

'You promised to honour and obey me, and now you attempt to hector over me, and threaten and accuse me and call me worse than a highwayman. If it were not for

your situation Helen, I would not submit to it so tamely. I won't be dictated by a woman, though she be my wife'. (235)

Indeed, the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* – still used nowadays – makes a telling difference between the husband and wife's wedding vows. For while the husband vows "to love and to cherish" the woman, the wife has to commit "to love, cherish, and *to obey*" the man [my emphasis]. This traditional rite of passage explicitly places the husband as master over the wife, a power imbalance also sanctioned by the Victorian law of coverture, thus leaving no possibility for the woman to enter into a state of equality with her husband and comply with the Scriptures and the law at the same time. What this means for the character of Helen Huntingdon is that she has become trapped in-between "the real and the ideal" (Jansson 31), hence the heroine's fluctuations derived from her wanting to serve two masters: her husband and God.

> Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (*King James Version* Eph. 5.22)

Women's submission to their husbands is the religious predicament that framed the social and moral ideal of the Angel in the House, which in turn founded the discourse of what was 'natural' in a woman. As Arthur tells Helen,

> 'It is a woman's nature to be constant – to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and for ever – bless them, dear creatures! and you above them all – but you must have some commiseration for us, Helen; you must give us a little more license […] you are an angel of heaven; only be not too austere in your divinity, and remember that I am a poor, fallible mortal'. (236)

Arthur's words are key to understanding Helen's future transgression, and they provide a depiction of the heroine that helps to transcend the traditional reading of Helen Huntingdon as Angel-figure: Helen, already visibly pregnant with her first child, which is in itself a threshold stage which separates the virgin from the mother (Engelhardt 164), has her identity further split in between the figure of the Virgin Mary and the Angel in the House.

Although Anne Brontë remained a staunch Anglican throughout her life, and in spite of her recurrent crises regarding salvation, no biographical material attests to any kind of gesture towards Catholicism – as happened to Charlotte during her stay in Brussels. Nonetheless, some passages in *The Tenant* allow for a comparison between Helen and the figure of the Virgin Mary. In fact, with his wife about to become a mother, Arthur mockingly paraphrases some lines from the "Hail Mary" prayer when he blesses Helen "above them all" – "blessed art thou among women" – and as a "poor, fallible, mortal" he asks for "commiseration" on behalf of his sex – "pray for us sinners".

And it is precisely upon becoming a wife and a mother that Helen Huntingdon finds herself "trapped in the interstitial dimension between different forms-of-process", a situation which for Greco and Stenner is a chief characteristic of the liminal hotspot (147).

> Now I am a wife […] and, thank Heaven, I am a mother too. God has sent me a soul to educate for heaven, and given me a new and calmer bliss, and stronger hopes to comfort me. But where hope rises, fear *must* lurk behind […] one of two thoughts is ever at hand to check my swelling bliss; the one: 'He may be taken from me;' the other: 'He may live to curse his own existence'. (239)

Although the ideal of Victorian domesticity for a woman involved the roles of wife and mother, now that she is a mother, Helen Huntingdon is shown to renegotiate her identity in a position in between the Angel in the House and the Virgin Mary. On the one hand, she acknowledges her role as wife, however, she sees her duty as mother as dictated by God, and therefore superior. Although matrimony is also sanctioned by religion, Helen Huntingdon recognises in her son a gift from heaven, a neophyte who truly is a *tabula rasa* and whose progress will depend entirely on the master or mistress of ceremonies he has. Moreover, she, as Mary, is in constant fear of having little Arthur taken away from her. On the other hand, Helen takes on a more active maternal role than the one usually assigned to the figure of the Virgin, praised for doing God's will rather than for her role as mother (Engelhardt 166).

Being "flesh of [her] flesh" (239), Helen is determined to "train [her son] to be God's servant while on earth, a blessed and honoured saint in Heaven" (239, 240), and to guard him from his father's errors (240), thus redefining her position as "Mediatrix between man and Christ" (*Virgin Mary* 5) in favour of her son rather than her husband. For this reason, Helen comes closer to the Virgin-figure as ready to sacrifice everything for her son's wellbeing, even her son's own life:

> if he should live […] to be a slave of sin, the victim of vice and misery, a curse to others and himself – Eternal Father, if Thou beholdest such a life before him, tear him from me now in spite of all my anguish, and take him from my bosom to thine own, while he is yet a guileless, unpolluted lamb! (240)

This portrayal of Helen as committed mother contrasts significantly with other instances of motherhood in the Brontës' novels – and Victorian novels in general for that matter: *Jane Eyre* only devotes a few lines to describe Jane and Rochester's baby, and in *Wuthering Heights* Mrs Earnshaw is a marginal character and Catherine

Earnshaw dies right after giving birth to her daughter. *Agnes Grey*, however, gives more attention to the blessing bestowed upon Agnes and Mr Weston with their three children. Thus, the existence, description, and influence of stable family relations upon the heroines appear as one of Anne Brontë's distinct features in her writings. Paradoxically, however, Helen's becoming a mother – the epitome of Victorian womanhood – will halt her progress by making her lose her fixed point in structure, even if of her own accord. When Helen Huntingdon finds herself trapped between her duty to her husband and her duty to her child, which she is eventually shown to find irreconcilable, *The Tenant* – similarly to *Agnes Grey* – shows how established Victorian family models and domestic codes do not necessarily work.

In fact, the collapse of differences that develops at Grassdale Manor re-structures the domestic space and turns the library into an ungendered site that works as a refuge from the anarchy that has polluted other rooms. Throughout *The Tenant*, libraries at Helen's different places of abode function as spaces that provide solace and comfort – very much like inns in *Villette*. This use of the library, traditionally a male space within the household,[109] turns this room into a gender-neutral space which, at Grassdale Manor, acquires the characteristics of a "Third Space" (Bhabha 53-56). The library at the Manor is eminently a female space which Helen comes to regard "as entirely [her] own, a secure retreat at all hours of the day [since] [n]one of [the] gentlemen had the smallest pretensions to a literary taste" (353). Moreover, it is in the library that Helen keeps all her painting materials, thus truly depicting this space as hosting and promoting the creativity that, according to Turner, arises from the potentiality offered by liminality (*Ritual Process* 128).

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[109] Libraries and studies are usually depicted as the places where the men of the house retire to attend to their occupations, as in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, or simply to escape female control, as for example in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

However, in spite of the solace offered by the library, the crisis outside brings Helen to discover the affair between Arthur and one of the female guests, and she asks to be released from her marital vows (306), that is, she wants to reverse the rite of passage that initiated her as impersonator of the Angel in the House. It is at this point, therefore, that Helen's transgression of social norms starts and she becomes a threat to the status quo. Nonetheless, her husband, as master of ceremonies, and in Victorian society, the visible head of marriage, will not let her go simply because he does not want to "be made the talk of the country" (306), thus highlighting the importance of the performative, secular aspect of matrimony as social contract and displacing the sacredness of the rite. In fact, when Arthur offers Helen to his friends, he not only brands her as completely disposable, but places her close to the figure of the prostitute:

> 'My wife! what wife? I have no wife,' replied Huntingdon, looking innocently from his glass – 'or if I have, look you gentlemen, I value her so highly that any one among you, that can fancy her, may have her and welcome – you may, by Jove and my blessing into the bargain!'. (355)

Arthur Huntingdon then repudiates the ideal of domesticity and turns his marriage into a mere farce for the sake of public display. That is, Helen and Arthur's life together becomes no more than a performance of everyday life.[110] It is under these circumstances that Helen's experience of the liminal hotspot, her feeling of being stuck "between different forms-of-process", becomes manifest when she finally says: "henceforth, we are husband and wife only the name […] I am your child's mother, and your *housekeeper* – nothing more" (306). With these words Helen's identity

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[110] See Turner, "Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting" for a discussion of how life becomes a performative act.

becomes split in as much as she does not recognise herself as Arthur's wife any longer, which leaves her trapped in a broken marriage, caught in between the figures of the suffering wife and the separated, free woman:

> I have had nine weeks' experience of this new phase of conjugal life – two persons living together, as master and mistress of the house, and father and mother of a winsome, merry little child, with the mutual understanding that there is no love, friendship, or sympathy between them. (321)

In referring to a "new phase" Helen is shown to have entered a new "circle of activity", one, however, she does not know how to handle because she has been

> 'caught suspended' in the limbo of an in-between phase of transition […] [an occasion] of *impasse* in which an interruption of the everyday, taken for granted state of affairs becomes permanent and the people involved become stuck, as it were, in enduring liminality. (Stenner et al. 142)

From being the mistress at Grassdale Manor, Helen has now become "a slave [and] a prisoner" in her own house (368).

Be that as it may, Helen's suspended transition is in part dictated by her sense of duty to her husband: the struggle between conflicting duties that has marked many of the heroine's decisions is still present at this point. Therefore, even if the protagonist is depicted as ready to disregard one of the main rites of passage in a woman's life, she still asks for permission to do it. This negotiation evidences the difficulty of escaping female liminality through the "invention of new forms-of-process" that can enable a "pattern shift" (Greco and Stenner 155). Moreover, by becoming resigned to this state of suspension, Helen Huntingdon not only moves away from the proto-sensational heroine she is shown to embody in other parts of the

novel, but she also works as a means to alter the structure of the traditional, male *Bildungsroman* through her strategy of seeming passivity, which sets a precedent for the character of Lucy Snowe.[111]

While in *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë engages with the metanarrative of the Woman Question and represents the protagonist's unremitting feeling of injustice as the motor force in her rite of passage, Helen Huntingdon is shown to re-assess her beliefs. Starting with the critical perception of Helen as a firm believer in the role of women as guardians of morality in the domestic sphere, literary criticism has evaluated the heroine from the premise that "women's profession was […] to be wives and mothers" (Davidoff and Hall 116). Therefore, the only way out of the liminal hotspot triggered by the realization of the shortcomings of that premise comes to Helen when she is forced to reassess her concept of duty upon finding her son "half tipsy, cocking his head and laughing at [her], and execrating [her] with words he little knew the meaning of" (351):

> this should not continue; my child must not be abandoned to this corruption: better far that he should live in poverty and obscurity, with a fugitive mother [...] I could endure it for myself, but for my son it must be borne no longer: the world's opinion and the feelings of my friends must be alike unheeded here, at least, alike unable to deter me from my duty. (351, 352)

With these words Helen is shown to assume the role of mistress of ceremonies for her child to resist "[his] absorption into the male world" (McMaster 355), a process that has already started.

> [M]y son, whom his father and his father's friends delighted to encourage in all the embryo vices a little child can show, and to instruct in all the evil habits he could

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[111] For a detailed analysis of instances of passivity in the character of Lucy Snowe, see Chapter 4.

acquire – in a word, to 'make a man of him' was one of their staple amusements […] So the little fellow came down every evening, in spite of his cross mamma, and learnt to tipple wine like papa, to swear like Mr Hattersley, and to have his own way like a man, and sent mamma to the devil when she tried to prevent him. (350)

Arthur Huntingdon has been acting as master of ceremonies in his son's rite of initiation into toxic masculinity, thus making sure that the "infant profligate" (351) will make a "worthy heir" (240) of the model of manliness he so carefully watches over. Therefore, in taking her child away, Helen Huntingdon is enacting a displacement of patrilineality – and therefore primogeniture – in favour of matrilineal influence:[112] "better far that he should live in poverty and obscurity, with a fugitive mother, than in luxury and affluence with such a father" (351).

Although it has been argued that Helen's motivation to leave her husband "is to fulfil the maternal aspect of the angelic role" (Jansson 45), and indeed she acknowledges "the higher duty [she] owe[s] to [her] son" (434), the ideal Victorian mother is a married mother. Therefore, I suggest that Anne Brontë is here challenging traditional sets of values, and therefore rites of passage, to test the potential paths offered by instances of suspended transitions as an alternative to established patterns. As a rebellious neophyte, Helen Graham will be able to free herself and her son from the pollution of toxic masculinity and the constraints of normative feminine models.

It is thanks to the new liminal phase that Helen experiences when she leaves Grassdale Manor and arrives at Linden-Car as Helen Graham that *The Tenant* offers a model of womanhood that would be later consolidated by sensation fiction when Helen is shown to become a self-supporting, independent woman, and saves little

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[112] I refer to matrilineality as "descend through the mother" (Barnard 33).

Arthur from repeating his father's mistakes. If Mary was "an imperfect model for Victorian women" and a threat because of the power that placed her out of male control (Engelhardt 167), Helen Graham, freed from the influence of toxic masculinities, is also regarded as an imperfect model of womanhood and motherhood, and a threat to the status quo. When Helen decides to enter a new phase of liminality by running away with her child and becoming "a fugitive mother" (351), the novel portrays an experience of female liminality which grants the potential to explore new models of womanhood and motherhood that might be sanctioned by society. In fact, it is in these circumstances that we first encounter Helen due to the novel's layered narrative structure, which gives priority to the heroine's suspended transition.

This third Helen, however, is introduced by Gilbert Markham. By displacing the role of narrator from Helen onto Gilbert, Brontë is salvaging the heroine's propriety and representing her diary – one of the "proper" kinds of female writing – as a "liminal narrative space between respectability and transgression" (Morse 5): a "Third Space" which allows for the positive potentiality inherent to the liminal stage in as much as it grants special culturally unrestrained "productive capacities" (Bhabha 56). It is through this displacement that Brontë shapes a layered narrative which echoes the structure of *Wuthering Heights* and at whose core we find Helen's process of disenchantment with contemporary domestic ideals, hence her liminal stage, which highlights also from a structural point of view the importance of transitional stages in the Brontës' novels. Therefore, even if the heroine's secret struggles,[113] and the whole novel for that matter, are embedded in a letter written by Gilbert which superimposes the male voice over a story that is fundamentally

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[113] For an analysis of secrecy and silence in Anne Brontë's works see Frawley.

female, what we find at the heart of the novel is the cause of Helen's suspended transition. Although it has been argued that Gilbert's role as narrator brings Helen out of focus since by the end of Gilbert's letter "Helen's voice has dropped out of the narrative entirely" (Carnell 6), this further reinforces the centrality of the heroine's suspended transition.[114] Moreover, by giving Helen's narrative a distinct style in the form of diary, it works as a threshold space between the first and second parts of Gilbert's account.

Nonetheless, the parallelism between Helen's and Gilbert's progress towards fulfilment and the fact that he is the character who takes on the role of narrator and also conveys his own progression has led some critics to focus on Gilbert's successful rite of passage in opposition to Arthur's, whose progress through redemption is never completed.[115] This trend in criticism displaces Helen's process of maturation and centres the spotlight on Markham's so-called reformation. However, Gilbert's *Bildungsroman* could be compared to William Crimsworth's in as much as it does not imply any radical change nor can we observe any meaningful instance of liminality. Gilbert's main point of reform consists in the taming of his "hypermasculinity" (Joshi 910) which by the end of the novel has made the character evolve into "the respectable Victorian husband, father, and landowner" (McMaster 353).

However, if "[y]oung Gilbert is childish, vain, competitive with other men […] and unable to control or manage his emotions" (Jacobs 208), the adult Gilbert who authors the letter is still profiting from his male privilege when he violates

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[114] Carnell further argues that "the disappearance of Helen Huntingdon's [sic] voice at the end of Brontë's novel only underscores the difficulty facing women who wanted to contribute to the public good" (12). Nonetheless, by the end of the novel Helen's contribution to "the public good" has been accomplished.

[115] For discussions about Gilbert's process of maturation or lack thereof see Jacobs, McMaster, Joshi and Pike.

Helen's confidence and transcribes her diary verbatim twenty years afterwards (Joshi 914). Moreover, if Gilbert matures it is thanks to Helen's diary and mainly through his acquaintance with Frederick Lawrence (McMaster 916). Being so, Helen's experience of the liminal hotspot, as recorded in her diary, is the driver for what little change Gilbert undergoes, turning him into a satellite of her own rite of passage. That is, without Helen's liminality there is no opportunity of 'reformation' for Markham, which makes Helen's liminal stage not only central to the structure of the novel, but also to the other characters' evolution, almost endowing the heroine with the characteristics of a removed mistress of ceremonies.

The story-within-a-story structure that frames the narrative has further implications for the characterization of Helen as heroine and the representation of the liminal hotspot. The protagonist is introduced to the reader at a point when she has already superseded her identity as the hopeful and expectant Helen Lawrence, and the married Helen Huntingdon: "'She is called Mrs Graham, and she is in mourning – not widow's weeds, but slightish mourning – and she is quite young, they say […] but *so* reserved!'" (14). The different family names that Helen acquires represent the different stages in her rite of passage which shows how the nature of the character's progression has a direct impact on her identity. The "mysterious lady" (15) inhabiting the Gothic Wildfell Hall arouses the curiosity and suspicion of the Austen-like community at Linden-Car where gossip "serv[es] the vital function of creating fellowship" (Joshi 909) not only among neighbours, I would add, but also between the characters at Linden-Car and the reader, who is expected to share their curiosity. Building on Joshi's discussion about gossip in *The Tenant*, I further argue that we can perceive how this practice has acquired a ritualistic component by which the community is held together – they stay in communion with each other through

the sharing of gossip. Moreover, this collective ritual practice which is done on a face-to-face basis emphasizes the importance of oral, direct intercourse in the village: speech comes across as the favoured means of communication. By refusing to partake of the community's favoured pastime, Helen Graham, already a liminar not only due to her fake widowhood, but also because she is a runaway wife, chooses to further displace herself because she is not in a state to undergo assimilation, and thus declines to submit to initiation through gossip.[116]

> 'They tried all they could to find out who she was, and where she came from, and all about her, but neither Mrs Wilson […] nor Miss Wilson […] could manage to elicit a single satisfactory answer, or even a casual remark, or chance expression calculated to allay their curiosity, or throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connections'. (14)

Already in the spotlight due to her position as latest arrival, Helen's refusal to play an active part in the community's rituals of socialization – she does not return most of her neighbours' visits, and bluntly states "I never go to parties" (28, 30) – turns her into the object of the villagers' gossip. That is, Helen becomes the means to nurture the feeling of community in Linden-Car, a position symbolically close to that of the sacrificial victim: it is through gossip and criticism of Helen that the community stands together and somehow protects itself against the outsider. The heroine's refusal to enter in communion with the members of the society she has just entered makes her neighbours consider her "somewhat self-opinionated" (15), "by no means amiable", and "liable to take strong prejudices" (43). In this way Helen Graham is shown to exclude herself, preclude her assimilation into the new society,

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[116] In this sense, Helen's self-rejection brings her close to the character of Jane Eyre who is shown to obliterate social assimilation on several occasions. See Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of the latter.

and therefore extend her liminal stage, a position which is further emphasised by her dismissal of speech: we learn about Helen's story through her diary. Thus Brontë "center[s] the narrative on a woman who cannot […] or will not […] speak for herself" (Frawley 119) showing how silence can function both as "a form of power and a form of powerlessness" (3) in as much as it makes the heroine safe but isolated.

Since Helen's first-person narration comes later in the novel, the heroine is first portrayed through the opinions of her neighbours and, although described as "self-opinionated", she is nonetheless deprived of the right for self-representation due to the suspended transition in which she is caught. At this point in the novel Helen's sense of duty to her son has turned her rite of passage into an amalgamation of different roles which prevent her progression: her fake widowhood – a staged rite that turns her life into a constant performance – her real condition as runaway wife – which places her in a limbo in between wifehood and singlehood – and her role as mother – which positions her as mistress of ceremonies for little Arthur. It is due to the complexity of the liminal hotspot Helen is experiencing, her being trapped in-between so many different positions, that she has to renounce the power of self-assertion through speech – so fundamental in *Jane Eyre* for instance – and thus declines social incorporation. This lay-out challenges the traditional *Bildungsroman* in as much as it delays the self-representation of the heroine by making her initial appearance in the novel depend on other characters' subjective accounts. Together with the reports about her seemingly asocial attitude towards her neighbours, Helen is further portrayed through Gilbert, whose first description of Mrs Graham functions to displace realism and in favour of a heroine more proper to Gothic fiction:

> And there I beheld a tall, ladylike figure, clad in black. Her face was towards me, and there was something in it, which, once seen, invited me to look again. Her hair was raven black […] altogether, she was rather charming than pretty. But her eyes – I must not forget those remarkable features, for therein her chief attraction lay […] they were long and narrow in shape, the irids black, or very dark brown, the expression various, and ever changing, but always either preternaturally – I had almost said *diabolically* – wicked, or irresistibly bewitching – often both. (17, 18)

Gilbert's description of Helen Graham has obvious echoes of Lockwood's representation of Catherine Linton in *Wuthering Heights*: "I had a distinct view of her whole figure and countenance […] and eyes – had they been agreeable in expression, they would have been irresistible – fortunately for my susceptible heart, the only sentiment they evinced hovered between scorn and a kind of desperation" (11). Referred to as a "witch" with "beautiful" (15) and "infernal eyes" (318) which can flash with "passion and resolution" (270) as well as with "malignity" (15), Catherine Linton is shown to express with her looks what she may not dare put in words. In the same way as Lockwood has the function of reading Catherine's eyes, *The Tenant* has Gilbert to interpret and make sense of Helen's. Both male decoders are faced with uncanny eyes they are simultaneously afraid of and attracted to.

The "preternatural" lure of Helen's eyes which can be both "wicked" and/or "irresistibly bewitching", together with the profusion of references to the colour black no doubt endow her with Gothic qualities that seem to make her fit for her place of abode: "cold and gloomy enough to inhabit", surrounded by "desolate fields" and which "to [Gilbert's] young imagination" presented "a goblinish appearance, that harmonized well with the ghostly legends and dark traditions […] respecting the haunted hall and its departed occupants" (23). Moreover, the fact that

Helen Graham also has the appearance of – and in fact is – a lady, together with the mystery that surrounds her arrival at Linden-Car anticipates the prototypical sensational heroine that would become so popular in the 1860's. Through this initial portrait of Helen Graham, Anne Brontë creates a heroine who sits in between realist and Gothic conventions and whose characterization accommodates itself to the different circles of activity she goes through thus showing how the different stages in a rite of passage may ask for different modes of telling.

Helen Graham's incorporation into the world of Linden-Car is further problematized by the new models of womanhood and motherhood – and consequently also masculinity and fatherhood – that she wants to promote and which have little to do with the more traditional stereotypes of domesticity celebrated in the village and embodied by Mrs Markham:

> 'I'm sure your poor, dear father was as good a husband as ever lived, and after the first six months or so were over, I should as soon have expected him to fly, as to put himself out of his way to pleasure me. He always said I was a good wife, and did my duty; and he always did his – bless him! – he was steady and punctual, seldom found fault without a reason, always did justice to my good dinners, and hardly ever spoiled my cookery by delay – and that's as much as any woman can expect of any man'. (58)

Mrs Markham's concept of a wife's duty relies on the premise of subservience to the husband, creating a homely atmosphere, and following social rituals, something which she is shown to inculcate in her yet unmarried daughter: "'You know Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what's proper to be done, and secondly, what's most agreeable to the gentlemen of the house – anything will do for the ladies'" (57). It is interesting to note how in spite of some critics'

claims about Gilbert's "hypermasculinity" (Joshi 910) and his "childish" attitude (Jacobs 208) at this point in the novel, he is the one to protest about his mother's "doctrine":

> 'if you would really study my pleasure, Mother, you must consider your own comfort and convenience a little more than you do [...] I might sink into the grossest condition of self-indulgence and carelessness about the wants of others, from the mere habit of being constantly cared for myself, and having all my wants anticipated or immediately supplied, while left in total ignorance of what is done for me'. (57, 58)

That is, had Mrs Markham over-indulged her son to the extreme from childhood, Gilbert may have grown up to be another Arthur Huntingdon. Therefore, although Helen Graham is the character most clearly positioned against "overly indulgent parents" (Pike 114), Gilbert is also depicted as embodying a type of manliness close to Victorian discourses about industry, self-restraint, etc.

The ideal of true manliness in the novel, however, is what Helen Graham expects to see in her son. Through Helen's position as mistress of ceremonies for little Arthur, Anne Brontë seems to advocate for "single motherhood [as] a healthier option than the traditional domestic family" where "paternal affections [can become] thoroughly corrupted" (Pike 113), thus proposing new models of independent, self-sufficient womanhood and motherhood that can counteract the effects of toxic masculinity and fatherhood – as Arthur Huntingdon's initiation of his son into his depraved version of clubland shows. Moreover, Helen's failure as mistress of ceremonies to her husband makes her finally realise the difficulties of reversing rites of initiation that have already led to full assimilation.

Nonetheless, unaware as the Linden-Car community is about Helen's past, her position as mother is misunderstood and contested. There are two distinct Victorian male initiation rites that little Arthur undergoes solely under her mother's guidance in her position as mistress of ceremonies: schooling and breeching. The Victorian rituals of breeching and schooling, which are not narrated in the novel, usually run parallel in time and represent a masculine coming out of sorts upon which the infant – at about the age of six – begins a process of separation from female authority and starts to be acculturated to finally become a member of the male, public sphere (Pike 112, 113). When the reader is first introduced to little Arthur, the boy is "apparently about five years old", wearing a "frock" (24), and not yet schooled.

Helen Graham, a self-supporting, single mother, wants to delay her son's assimilation into the male sphere in order to undo the initiation that the father had started. However, the Markham family, who lives up to contemporary middle-class expectations, sees Helen as an inappropriate mistress of ceremonies due to her advocacy of matrilineal influence:

> '[…] my dear Mrs Graham, let me [Mrs Markham] warn you in good time against the error – the fatal error, I may call it – of taking the boy's education upon yourself. – Because you are clever, in some things, and well informed, you may fancy yourself equal to the task; but indeed you are not; and, if you persist in the attempt, believe me, you will bitterly repent it when the mischief is done.'
> 'I am to send [Arthur] to school, I suppose, to learn to despise his mother's authority and affection!' […]
> 'Oh, *no*! – But if you would have a boy despise his mother, let her keep him at home, and spend her life in petting him up, and slaving to indulge his follies and caprices'. (32, 33)

In a community such as Linden-Car, where socialization is deemed so important, and "in all household matters […] what's proper to be done" comes first, the inhabitants resist the "pattern shift" that Helen represents. Mrs Markham clearly regards Helen as a threat, not so much to the status quo, but to little Arthur and, consequently, to the models of manliness the matron considers proper. Helen's reluctance to let go of her son – she must always have him within sight – is regarded by the Markhams as a rite of effemination: "'you will treat him like a girl – you'll spoil his spirit, and make a mere Miss Nancy of him'" (33).

Moreover, Helen has "done what [she] could to make [Arthur] hate [wine and spirits]", and has succeeded in making the child "[detest] the very sight of wine" and become almost sick by the "smell of it" (31). This purge that Helen has subjected Arthur to with the hope of "sav[ing] him from one degrading vice at least" (31) constitutes a rite of purification aimed at cleansing the child of his earlier contact with toxic masculinity and "parasitic gentlemanliness" (Hyman 456). Nonetheless, during the 1820's, the timeframe for the novel, temperance was already considered a sign of morality, religious righteousness, and industry, but discourses about abstinence were not yet well-spread (Hyman 453, 461). Therefore, Helen's "very excellent plan" (31) is laughed at by everyone:

> 'Well, Mrs Graham,' said [Mrs Markham], wiping the tears of merriment form her bright, blue eyes – 'well, you surprise me! I really gave you credit for having more sense – The poor child will be the veriest milksop that ever was sopped! Only think what a man you will make of him'. (31)

All the criticism about Helen's guidance of her child is based on contemporary gender assumptions about masculinity and femininity. By deferring Arthur's entrance into the male sphere and making him develop an aversion towards habits

traditionally considered male, the Markhams, as representatives of the community of Linden-Car, question Helen's competence as mistress of ceremonies for a boy.

Nonetheless, the rationale behind Helen Graham's decisions as "ritual elder" (Turner *Ritual Process* 96) goes beyond the situation of her son. In what we may consider this heroine's feminist manifesto, Helen explains the inadequacy of rites of initiation based on gender:

> 'Well, Mr Markham, you that maintain that a boy should not be shielded from evil, but sent to battle against it, alone and unassisted […] would you use the same argument with regard to a girl? […] No; you would have her tenderly and delicately nurtured, like a hot-house plant – taught to cling to others for direction and support, and guarded, as much as possible, from the very knowledge of evil […] Is it that you think she *has* no virtue? […] they are *both* weak and prone to err, and the slightest error, the merest show of pollution will ruin the one, while the character of the other will be strengthened and embellished […] You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience, while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others'. (33, 34)

It is thus that Helen Graham is shown to attest to and complain about the differences that gender imposes on rites of passage – a fact disregarded by Van Gennep, Turner, and others. In pointing out how boys, as opposed to girls, are allowed to make mistakes in order to gain experience in their progress towards maturity, Helen Graham enters into metaphorical dialogue with Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, both of whom are shown to deeply regret women's lack of experience of the world.

Following on her reflection on how "the slightest error" may "ruin" a girl's life and prospects, while a boy may proudly brandish it as a battle wound, Helen

Graham goes on to vindicate new, more inclusive and democratic rites of initiation for girls which can eventually develop into new models of womanhood:

> 'Now *I* would have both so to benefit by the experience of others, and the precepts of a higher authority, that they should know beforehand to refuse the evil and choose the good and require no experimental proofs to teach them the evil of transgression. I would not send a poor girl into the world, unarmed against her foes, and ignorant of the snares that beset her path: nor would I watch and guard her, till, deprived of self-respect and self-reliance, she lost the power, or the will, to watch and guard herself'. (34)

This is the rite of initiation that Helen Graham would set for both boys and girls alike in order to make them equally free and experienced adults. It is thanks to her suspended transition and her experience of the liminal hotspot that Helen feels entitled, thanks to the potentiality offered by this stage, to speak her mind against custom and tradition, thus showing how her development has not been arrested by liminality.

It is precisely as a free and experienced woman that Helen Graham has the opportunity of being assimilated back into society once Arthur Huntingdon dies and she becomes a free woman who does not need to hide anymore. Helen's failure as "ministering angel" (Frawley 132), redeemer, and saviour of Arthur Huntingdon also positions her as unsuccessful mistress of ceremonies for her husband, which makes her especially eager to guide her son down the right path. In spite of her previous conviction, while still Helen Lawrence, about a wife's "authority as moral educator" (Frawley 133), her ultimate failure in making Arthur repent and try and save his soul works to displace contemporary notions about domestic ideology. In depicting Helen as unable to make her depraved husband purge himself, Brontë not only questions

the ideal of the Angel in the House but she also conforms to the "traditional policy of Christian persuaders" (Thormählen *Brontës and Religion* 74): Helen's lack of success shows how salvation cannot possibly be a wife's duty, but rather God's doing (Frawley 134, 135; Thormählen *Brontës and Religion* 84), since "no human agent can serve as a mediator between God and man: Christ is the only intercessor" (Thormählen *Brontës and Religion* 74).

Helen Graham eventually "re-enters society" not because she has "'redeemed' for [her] 'sins' against it" (Jansson 32), but rather because her suspended transition has finally endowed her with the experience and the power of self-assertion traditionally considered male.[117] It is thanks to her liminal stage that Helen Graham has acquired the means to promote new, more liberating models of womanhood and motherhood while advocating for different codes of masculinity. As such, Helen's rite of passage represents a great contrast to Lucy Snowe's, a redundant woman who is depicted for most of *Villette* as lacking the will and strength to enact a transgression that sets her free from liminality.

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[117] Rachel Carnell argues that "Helen's voice is rational, confident, and self-sufficient at this point in the narrative – and by the norms of the day, her discourse would certainly be deemed masculine" (10).

CHAPTER 4

"[T]hat insufferable thought of being no more loved, no more owned": affective liminality in *Villette*

Villette (1853) is considered Charlotte Brontë's most 'experimental' text. A final turn of the screw that recovers some of the most cutting-edge elements in previous texts only to take the Victorian novel one step further, *Villette* "threaten[s] to burst the bounds of realism" (Glen 200) with its blend of Gothic, realism, and proto-modernism. This conjunction destabilises the narrative in many ways and resists the reader's easy identification with the narrator since the novel "distorts the structure of the *Bildungsroman* by narrating what is not available to its first-person narrator's consciousness" (Cohn 26). At the same time, *Villette*'s stylistic in-betweenness makes some of the elements characteristic of the liminal hotspot stand out more clearly and presents Lucy Snowe as the liminar *par excellence* in the Brontës' fiction: Lucy's liminality is first hinted at in chapter four and her suspended transition is, I argue, never resolved, thus leaving the protagonist "stuck in liminality" (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22).

Analysing the novel through the lens of anthropological work about the ritual process and theories about liminality shows the Brontës' interest in transitional stages and their constant disregard of traditional rites of passage, also highlighting the sisters' revision of the generic *Bildungsroman*. In fact, my analysis shows how *Villette*'s organising principle is structured by re-enacted sets of actions, or recursive "circles of activity" (Greco and Stenner 150) which endow the novel with a repetitive quality that at points seems to prevent the plot from moving forward. This structure mirrors the protagonist's own "psychosocial experience" (Greco and

Stenner 148) of the liminal hotspot, which is mainly depicted through cycles of either "paralysis" or forced action aimed at enacting a "pattern shift". Both "paralysis" and the potential for a "pattern shift" are characteristic of the encounter with the liminal hotspot (Stenner et al. 141; Greco and Stenner 155) and are key to the relation between plot and structure in *Villette*.

As already shown in previous chapters, the stylistic in-betweenness that favours the representation of the experience of the liminal hotspot and instances of suspended transitions in other novels of the Brontës also applies to *Villette*: the fact that the novel seems to suspend itself between styles as an example of the quality of "both/and" and "neither/nor" identified as characteristic of liminal hotspots (Kofoed and Stenner 169) allows the narrative to encompass episodes and experiences that defy the limits of Victorian realism and which evidence the "[t]ensions between style and plot" (Cohn 4) characteristic of stories of female development.

Moreover, an analysis of suspended transitions in *Villette* clarifies its relationship with Charlotte Brontë's earlier novels, especially *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*. *The Professor* narrates an Anglo-Belgian male *Bildungsroman*, thus inviting a comparative reading of both texts which shows gender differences in the treatment of liminality. *Jane Eyre*, the best-known and most acclaimed of Charlotte's novels, which stands apart as the Victorian narrative of a woman's troubled development *par excellence*, is revisited in *Villette* to problematize some of the former's features, especially the concepts of female fulfilment and happy ending. In this sense, *Villette* can be read as reworking these earlier novels, thus establishing a dialogue with them.

As with other Brontëan heroines, Lucy Snowe's liminal stage is triggered by her utter dependence, social displacement, and sense of non-belonging. However,

Lucy's social and emotional uprootedness is complicated by her position as redundant woman, a situation that develops into a liminal hotspot: "an occasion of sustained uncertainty, ambivalence, and tension in which people feel 'caught suspended' in the limbo of an in-between phase of transition" and which is shown to make the heroine "become stuck" due to the interruption of the "everyday, taken for granted state of affairs" (Stenner et al. 141, 142).

Analysing Lucy Snowe's position as a redundant woman through anthropological theories about liminality and Turner's concept of the "social drama" shows how the protagonist is caught in an experience of liminality that is genuinely female,[118] and which has the potential to evolve into a liminal hotspot which, I suggest, is never resolved. This lack of reassimilation emphasises Charlotte Brontë's interest in stories of female suspended transitions which depart from the structure of the generic *Bildungsroman*.

Victor Turner defines a "social drama" as "an objectively isolable sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive or agonistic type" and identifies four different stages: "*breach*", "*crisis*", "*redressive action*", and "*reintegration*" or "*recognition and legitimation of the inseparable schism* between the contending parties" [emphasis in the original] (*Anthropology of Performance* 33-35). Thus, Turner's concept of social drama stands for an alteration of social order which, should the "redressive action" fail to succeed, may lead to irreconcilable positions held by different groups within a society and produce a state of crisis as the "new normal": in other words, a large-scale social rite of passage.

Turner's fourfold process runs parallel to Van Gennep's tripartite structure in a rite of passage whose successful resolution is not granted: the breach represents a

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[118] As already mentioned in this dissertation, one of the clearest shortcomings of theories about liminality is that they fail to make gender distinctions thus disregarding the possibility of different patterns in rites of passage which may be derived from the neophyte's gender.

separation from a previous state; the stages of crisis and redressive action are liminal in that they stand for a threshold between two different orders (Turner *Anthropology of Performance* 75); and reintegration or lack thereof corresponds to assimilation, the assumption of a new order – which may entail accepting crisis as the 'new normal' if no reintegration occurs. It is in the liminal stages of "crisis" and "redressive action" that *Villette* dwells in its portrayal of the "Redundant Woman" debate which, I argue, can be interpreted as a social drama which suspended thousands of women's transitions. By depicting a redundant woman immersed in what Turner would identify as the liminal stages of a "social drama", Charlotte Brontë devotes *Villette* to the analysis of Lucy Snowe's suspended transition and her "psychosocial experience" of the liminal hotspot.

The figure of the redundant woman became more culturally visible when the 1851 Census showed that women outnumbered men by over four hundred thousand and "that 42 per cent of the women between the ages of twenty and forty were unmarried and that two million out of Britain's six million women were self-supporting" (Poovey 4). This increase in "the number of single middle-class women in need of employment was a product not only of the unstable conditions of business in those years" (Peterson 6). It was also caused by the large numbers of single men leaving for the colonies, the differential mortality rate and the fact that middle-class men were marrying later in life (6).

Concern about these so-called 'surplus' women rose as they were conceptualised as trapped in between the impossibility of fulfilling the ideal of the angel in the house and the potential danger of their becoming fallen women: they were seen as stranded in "the interstitial dimension between different forms-of-process" (Greco and Stenner 147). This entrapment became the focus of social

debate and crisis ensued. Dependant, resourceless, middle-class single women represented a threat for Victorian society in several aspects: if the squalor of the workhouse and the restraint of the asylum were to be avoided and no occupation, however menial, could be found many women, it was argued, would turn to prostitution, beggary, or suicide out of desperation:[119] that is, they were regarded as dangerous liminars and therefore displaced to the role of scapegoats.

The publicly staged moral corruption into which these so-called redundant women might eventually fall out of sheer necessity and desperation would collide with a well spread system of ideals that regarded women as the guardians of morality and whose highest aims in life should be marriage and motherhood. Actually, the fact that such a large number of women had no mathematical possibility of ever getting married in England showed the shortcomings of investing so strongly in a female ideal which solely relied on domesticity. The system of meaning that had established the worthiness of a woman in relation to her achievements in the private sphere left thousands of women in a liminal position never experienced by men: a liminal position exclusively female. These women's expected transition from daughters to wives and mothers got suspended by a system that failed to provide the means to materialize those expectations and to supply them with a respectable alternative. Thus, in Girardian terms, these women were regarded by some as disposable members of society whose sacrifice was acceptable because it was believed to entail a benefit for the many.

The multiple conversations and initiatives which aimed at taking "redressive action" to resolve this crisis came to be known as the "Redundant Woman" debate. One of the best known interventions in this debate is W. R. Greg's. This social

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[119] See Greg for the contemporary rationale behind this argument, and Poovey for an analysis.

commentator could see only one way out of the crisis: exporting redundant women to the colonies, where they would have better chances of getting married or being able to support themselves while still belonging to the infrastructure of the British Empire. Greg's suggestion can be understood as a rite of purification on a national scale aimed at cleansing, and therefore protecting, England from the potential pollution that these redundant neophytes could spread.

Some proto-feminist associations also supported the emigration scheme although they did not frame it in such mercantile terms, but rather saw it as a way of granting women new chances and opportunities to develop as individuals which were denied to them at home:[120] that is, they saw this "social drama" as conveying the potential to enact new "pattern shifts" (Greco and Stenner 155) beneficial to the liminars involved. Needless to say, not everyone considered emigration to be the right sort of "redressive action", and many groups argued for the necessity of women being trained to enter the marketplace at liberty and without risking their reputations as the proper way out of liminality. In short, the advocacy for women to be able to support themselves as men were doing came centre stage again, and the Woman Question evolved into the Redundant Woman debate. However, the difference of opinions and proposed strategies to address this social crisis proved too wide to achieve a stage of reintegration and although those who chose to leave England were assisted in their rite of passage and offered facilities, the redundant women who decided to stay at home were left to their own devices to navigate such troubled waters and thus became neophytes with no "ritual elder" (Turner *Ritual Process* 96) to guide them out of this threshold stage.

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[120] See Poovey for an extended discussion about the figure of the Redundant Woman.

Charlotte Brontë was familiar with the social drama of the redundant woman. From a young age Charlotte herself felt uneasy about the prospect of singlehood. Already in 1845, in a letter to her former teacher and long-life friend Margaret Wooler, Charlotte declares she is happy to hear that Miss Wooler "[is] enjoying [herself] because it proves […] [that] even a 'lone woman' can be happy" (Smith 448). Charlotte's fears about growing into a "lone woman" in England in the 1840s when the Woman Question was the focus of attention of many activists may have been made more acute by the fact that in that same year her school-friend Mary Taylor had decided to settle in New Zealand to make a life for herself far from the social expectations and restrictions that constrained many women in the metropolis. In fact, when the redundancy crisis came about, Taylor's strong proto-feminist views led her to position herself as a strong advocate for female emigration since she believed it offered opportunities for female freedom and independence which at the time were unattainable at home. However, Charlotte Brontë's position is more elusive. In fact, although *Villette* has been considered the author's response to the "Redundant Woman" debate, there are no records of Brontë's personal views of the case.[121]

Nonetheless, by the time Charlotte Brontë was writing *Villette* her circumstances were greatly changed: she had broken free from the restraints imposed by the private sphere. Already a celebrated author after disclosing the true identities of the Bells, Charlotte enjoyed fame and had the money to support herself and her father. Even if the author herself wrote in a letter to her publisher that "'Villette' touches on no matter of public interest" (Barker 353), I argue that given her new position in society, and with the Redundant Woman question in the air, Brontë took

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[121] For an analysis of the "Redundant Woman" debate and *Villette* see Fenton-Hathaway.

a step forward and contributed to the debate by telling the story of one of those 'surplus', disposable women. The idea that this novel can be read as Charlotte Brontë's take upon the crisis is not new. However, analysing it through the lens of Turner's conceptualization of a "social drama" brings into sharper critical focus the ways in which *Villette* is devoted to the narration of a 'surplus' woman's experience of the liminal hotspot by portraying the stages of "crisis" and "redressive action" which may or may not issue in resolution and reintegration.

In a further letter to her publisher Charlotte Brontë refers to Lucy Snowe as "[t]hat – person – that – that – individual – 'Lucy Snowe'" (Barker 368), a hesitancy of expression which reflects the very special and complex nature of this character. As protagonist and first-person narrator, Lucy is a character who escapes a clear-cut definition: she is constantly in the making. In fact, Lucy not only challenges the reader, but also the other characters in the novel; no one truly knows what to make of her: "[w]ho *are* you, Miss Snowe?" (307), one of the characters asks after quite some time of acquaintance. Indeed there is no easy answer to that question: "[w]ho am I indeed?" is the vague reply that Lucy offers (308).

The evasiveness of Lucy's reply is characteristic of her position throughout the novel, which tends to favour place in order to elude notions of selfhood, as the title of the book already evidences (Shuttleworth 219). Indeed, the connection between selfhood and place in the novel is so tight that Lucy's is a "narrative of psychic and social *placelessness* and dislocation" [my emphasis] (Braun 189). In fact, this chapter shows how both types of dislocation operate at different levels and interact to create an overall feeling of incompleteness in relation to Lucy's rite of passage. For most of the novel the protagonist is positioned in the liminal stage since shortly after the start of the story her rite of separation takes place: Lucy has become

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an orphan, dependent and destitute girl; a socially disposable entity; but most importantly, she does not have a home and does not feel loved. It is by emphasising these feelings of uprootedness and non-belonging that Brontë presents the reader with her most complex protagonist and dwells on the importance of the psychological aspect of the liminal hotspot.[122]

From the very beginning of the novel Brontë depicts Lucy as a cryptic narrator who withholds as much information as she shares. Through Lucy's changes of subject and focus, extended metaphors, and a language rich in symbolism, the author portrays a seemingly psychologically ill person. The common understanding that Lucy suffers from trauma and neurosis asks for a reading of the protagonist as a haunted entity in constant search for a home.[123] This is where self and space merge and collide:

> One need not be a chamber – to be Haunted –
>
> One need not be a House –
>
> The Brain – has Corridors surpassing
>
> Material Place –. (Dickinson 1-4)

Emily Dickinson's verses aptly describe not only the conception that the reader develops of Lucy's mental state, but they also follow the protagonist's own understanding of the mind as place: "pedigree, social position, and recondite intellectual acquisition, occupied about the same space and place in my interests and

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[122] Although the concept of the liminal hotspot has been identified as having psychological connotations in as much as it can impact the affective and emotional state of an individual, as discussed in the Introduction, theories about liminality have tended to disregard the importance and necessity of overcoming affective liminality in order for the stage of reincorporation to be actually successful.

[123] Different critics use different terms to refer to Lucy's psychological state. See Braun and Shuttleworth.

thoughts; they were my third-class lodgers – to whom could be assigned only the small sitting-room and the little back bed-room" (309).

The source of Lucy's emotional distress is never clearly disclosed to the reader. In fact, Lucy is a heroine who would rather speak about others, a protagonist who feels more comfortable in the background:

> My godmother lived in a handsome house in the clean and ancient town of Bretton. Her husband's family had been residents there for generations, and bore, indeed, the name of their birthplace – Bretton of Bretton: whether by coincidence, or because some remote ancestor had been a personage of sufficient importance to leave his name to his neighbourhood, I know not. (5)

The very first lines of the novel show Lucy's tendency to digress in order to avoid being in the spotlight – a contradictory pose for a first-person narrator which shows how Lucy is evasive even within the privacy of her own mind. Here Lucy is already displacing the focus of attention onto her godmother and speculations about Mrs Bretton's family's past, a past she does not even share, her family name being Snowe and not Bretton. This strategy of diversion is the narrator's device to avoid feeling under scrutiny, both by the reader and those whom she encounters, a mechanism that is repeated throughout the narrative.[124] Once she introduces herself in the story the cryptic style that marks her way of telling and renders her an unreliable narrator can be easily spotted:[125]

> I was staying at Bretton; my godmother having come in person to claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence. I believe she then plainly saw events coming, whose very shadow I scarce guessed; yet of which

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[124] As Moran argues, "Lucy's narrative manipulation demonstrates a belief in her *entitlement* to the privacy essential to self-respect and dignity" (97).

[125] For discussions about Lucy's role as narrator see for example Moran, Shuttleworth, and Glen.

the faint suspicion sufficed to impart unsettled sadness and made me glad to change

scene and society. (5, 6)

Lucy Snowe is claimed by Mrs Bretton, her godmother, from her "kinsfolk". Who

and where these people are, why Mrs Bretton decides to claim Lucy, and what kind

of problems the former foresees are questions that remain unanswered throughout

the novel. As readers, we can only guess that Lucy is an orphan who may have been

living among some distant relatives when Mrs Bretton decides to take care of her.

The nature of those "events" remains obscure but allusions to disasters proliferate in

Lucy's account:

> I too well remember a time – a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this
>
> hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltness [sic] of briny waves
>
> in my throat, and their icy pressure in my lungs. 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. (35)

This tale of anguish and loss seems to be the key to Lucy's secret past, her

"*sensitive*" nature (13) – easily disturbed by certain weather conditions – her

proneness to nervous fits, and, most importantly, her emotional liminality. The fact

that Lucy refers to "*the* nightmare" [my emphasis] makes this experience stand apart

from other psychological ordeals and is only comparable to the nightmare she has at

Madame Beck's. Moreover, the detail with which the physicality of the incident is

narrated through the references to the taste of sea water, the "icy pressure in [her]

lungs", the cold that was felt, and the duration of what appears to be a shipwreck

evidences the strong trace it has left in the protagonist's memory: "I too well

remember". The fact that Lucy does not focus on the other persons involved, but just refers to "we" and "the crew" is in keeping with her eagerness to veil her past, exactly as when she speaks of her "kinsfolk" without providing any further details. Lucy's tale recounts an event that must have erased all her kin from the earth, a metaphorical shipwreck which has destroyed life as she knew it.

The incident displaced by Lucy's nightmare marks the rite of separation and therefore sets the start of her liminal stage. This liminality is already present in Lucy's way of telling: through the use of extended metaphor the protagonist provides an account of an in-between state – sleep – which works to displace reality. Thus Lucy places her past in the limbo of memory. From this point onwards she is alone in the world. Having lost contact also with the Brettons due to "[i]mpediments, raised by others", Lucy's liminal stage is marked by utter destitution: "I complained to no one about these troubles. Indeed, to whom could I complain?" (35).

Understanding a liminal hotspot as "an occasion during which people feel they are caught suspended in the circumstances of a transition that has become permanent" (Stenner et al. 141) and which "can also be described as a phase characterised by affective volatility" (Greco and Stenner 160) highlights the importance of Lucy's lack of affection, which translates into a state of emotional liminality. Taking the 'shipwreck' as the main trigger for Lucy's "affective volatility" and argued mental instability, what the novel portrays is the protagonist's extended experience of "sustained uncertainty, ambivalence and tension", traits which are characteristic of the liminal hotspot (Stenner et al. 141, 142) and which lead to instances of "emotional overheat" and consequent "burnouts" characteristic of suspended transitions (Szakolczai "Permanent (Trickster) Liminality" 234). These

features are always hovering above Lucy and may be considered distinctive traits of her personality.

The fact that Lucy's liminal stage, her suspended transition, stretches for the entirety of the novel, which covers a time span of several years, shows the Brontës' interest in transitional stages over traditional rites of passage characteristic of the *Bildungsroman* and establishes a special contrast between *The Professor* and *Villette*. Moreover, this dilating upon threshold and indeterminate states allows for a new analysis of *Villette*'s structure and Lucy's cyclical behaviour since it can be interpreted according to the different features that can characterise a liminal hotspot: "paradox, paralysis, polarisation, and (potentially) pattern shift" (Greco and Stenner 155).[126] These features are shown to be triggered by certain spaces, a fact which demonstrates the tight connection between the protagonist and place.

During the English chapters and until she starts for London, Lucy is shown to occupy closed spaces where her power for action lies dormant. The protagonist's stay with the Brettons as protégée – marking the place as a closed space that allows for passivity and safety – foreshadows Lucy's future once Polly Home is introduced to the household. The character of Polly runs parallel to Lucy's, and establishes her as one of Lucy's alter egos. During the early days of her acquaintance, Polly also serves as a mirror, a screen upon which Lucy can articulate and project the fears she seems too scared to own: "'[h]ow will [Polly] get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason tell me are prepared for all flesh?'" (34). The belated answers to these questions appear when it is Lucy who needs to

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[126] Greco and Stenner "relate the uncertain, ambiguous, and undecidable experience of suspension in transitional limbo to an encounter with *paradox*" (155). Nonetheless, rather than facing a situation which involves self-contradictory features, what Lucy Snowe is shown to encounter and get paralysed by is the conflicted nature of the liminal hotspot.

figure out how to "get through this world, or battle with this life", that is, when she fully feels the conflicted nature of the liminal hotspot.

Moreover, it is through Polly's introduction into the narrative that Lucy is first shown to occupy the position of a redundant woman: Mrs Bretton, "not generally a caressing woman", "talked in little fond phrases as she chafed the child" and "kissed it" (8), and "[i]ll-assimilated as [Graham and Polly] were in age, sex, pursuits, &c., they somehow found a great deal to say to each other" (23). Through Lucy's observations about the interactions between Polly and the Brettons the protagonist becomes displaced from the centre of the action, which in this case has a strong affective component to it, and narrates from the margins. It is thus that Lucy's displacement and incipient redundancy at the Brettons' foreshadow the suspended transition she will experience throughout the novel and her final removal from the Brettons' circle when Graham decides to marry Polly.

After the 'shipwreck', Lucy is depicted as displaying "extreme passivity" (Cohn 32), a state of paralysis which, I suggest, derives from the encounter with the conflicted nature of the liminal hotspot: used to having been surrounded by her kinsfolk and being "claimed" by Mrs Bretton, so far Lucy had been the object of other people's actions but never the active subject. Upon finding herself alone, bereaved, and with no means for self-support for the first time, Lucy faces "the uncertain, ambiguous, and undecidable experience of suspension in transitional limbo" (Greco and Stenner 155). The conflict of the liminal hotspot finally strikes her:

> Thus, there remained no possibility of dependence upon others; to myself alone could I look. I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature; but self-reliance

and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances […] It seemed I must be stimulated into action. I must be goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy. (36, 38)

Unlike most of the Brontës' heroines, and in particular contrast to Jane Eyre,[127] Lucy Snowe is presented as lacking the initiative to be dynamic and to provide for herself: the experience of her suspended transition actually paralyses her and she has to be forced into action. Lucy's encounter with the conflicted nature of the liminal hotspot also has an effect on her narrative: she has to become the focus – "to myself alone could I look" – rather than diverting the attention onto others. Although she is shown as still reluctant to provide the reader with many details, on this occasion there remains no possibility of projection upon others.

Lucy's articulation of her liminality, however, fails to force her into action as she anticipated but rather paralyses her. Instead of becoming the self-reliant character her circumstances demand, Lucy goes back to her passive mood: "[Miss Marchmont], hearing of my bereaved lot, had sent for me […] She sent for me the next day; for five or six successive days she claimed my company" (36, 37). Taking into account Lucy's state of utter destitution and dependency, her reluctance to accept a position as companion to Miss Marchmont, and the apathy with which she reacts can only be accounted for by the paralysis caused by the liminal hotspot. Once Lucy accepts the situation, the narrowness and seclusion brought on by this new post seem to be quite agreeable to her because they allow for further apathy. This new seclusion represents a momentary escape from the conflicts associated with the liminal stage by means of further passivity: while Lucy is with Miss Marchmont she does not need to worry about how to get through this world.

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[127] Cohn notes how "Lucy is not the productive, demonstrative, or expressive exemplar of development that previous heroines Jane Eyre and Shirley were, and Brontë's original readers were puzzled by the sense that *Villette*'s coming of age plot was not fully owned" (33).

> Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty – her pain, my suffering – her relief, my hope – her anger, my punishment – her reward, my reward. I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an ever-changing sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick-chamber; I was almost content to forget it. All within me became narrowed to my lot. (37)

The description of Lucy's new situation and setting gives a sense of the constraint and oppression of her new status, something which, nonetheless, she does not regret and which sets her apart from the rest of Charlotte Brontë's protagonists. In the same way as the space the protagonist occupies narrows down, so does her perception of the outer world and her prospects. She is described as becoming one with Miss Marchmont and her surroundings. The fact that Lucy's self becomes assimilated to that of "a crippled old woman" shows the parallels between the fates of both women: both are dependent, disposable, alone, and with not very bright prospects. Apart from the foretelling that Miss Marchmont's story of a dead love (39-41) represents for Lucy's own love story with Paul Emanuel, the quasi symbiotic connection established between both women dramatizes the reality of experiences of female liminality triggered by the Redundant Woman "social drama" by linking and comparing a resourceless young woman's future to that of an old disabled lady who is about to die.

Furthermore, the physical enclosure that Lucy undergoes during this part of the novel stresses her invisibility and her exclusion from the world at large. Once her life is reduced to taking care of Miss Marchmont, in a sense, Lucy disappears: she becomes invisible to society and, in some ways, to the reader as well. Her stay with Miss Marchmont affords Lucy with a new chance of displacing the focus of attention

from herself. Thus, the protagonist's reality at this point is marked by her suspended transition and the social dislocation it implies and what could be read as her compliance with it: the world has forgotten her in the same way as she has forgotten the world, an attitude that further represents an outstanding contrast with, for example, Jane Eyre's or Shirley's longings for freedom and wider horizons. This passage shows once more how Lucy's articulation of her reality depicts the protagonist as letting herself be carried along rather than trying to benefit from the potentiality offered by the liminal stage.

Miss Marchmont's death takes Lucy back to her starting point after the 'shipwreck' and shows how the novel is structured around recurrent "circles of activity": Lucy reencounters the conflicted nature of the liminal hotspot. Again in a situation of total destitution, Lucy finds herself "once more alone" and having to "look for a new place" (43). On this occasion, however, she evades the phase of paralysis by going "as a last and sole resource" to seek advice from Mrs Barrett, "an old servant of [Lucy's] family; once [her] nurse, now housekeeper at a grand mansion" (43). This brief episode reinforces Lucy's suspended transition by means of the contrast it establishes between the protagonist's past and present, and between the positions occupied by Lucy and Mrs Barrett also showing how middle-class women were more prone to becoming 'redundant'. Lucy's meeting with Mrs Barrett places the protagonist below the status of a servant without providing a clear sense of where she belongs, thus emphasising how the 'shipwreck' has left Lucy in a "limbo of statuslessness" (Turner *Ritual Process* 97): while Mrs Barrett, through her job as *housekeeper*, indeed has a house to keep, Lucy has one week to leave her present abode "while with another [she is] not provided" (42).

Lucy's homelessness is further dramatized in this episode by her walk back from her visit to Mrs Barrett, a passage that shows the protagonist's total exposure to nature, the only home available to her:

> I left her about twilight; a walk of two miles lay before me; it was a clear frosty night […] I should have trembled in that lonely walk, which lay through still fields, and passed neither village nor farm-house, nor cottage; I should have quailed in the absence of moonlight […] I should have quailed still more in the unwonted presence of that which to-night shone in the north, a moving mystery – the Aurora Borealis. But this solemn stranger influenced me otherwise than through my fears. (43, 44)

This passage necessarily reminds the reader of Jane Eyre's wandering in the moors, establishing a parallel between the protagonists' situations. Here we can see Lucy traversing deserted fields in a "clear frosty night", a fact that adds to the dramatic force of the excerpt and furthers the connection between the protagonist and space through the relation between "frosty" and "Snowe". Moreover, the absence of the moon, a characteristic surrogate mother in Charlotte Brontë's writings, stresses Lucy's isolation. Instead, a strange phenomenon, "the Aurora Borealis", takes the moon's place. Lucy refers to the Northern Lights – quite rare in England – as a "moving mystery" and "solemn stranger" thus giving this scene a Gothic quality. Perhaps because, to some extent, Lucy is also presented as a "moving mystery", an identification seems to be established between them and, strengthening the parallels with *Jane Eyre*, Lucy is depicted as entering into some a of supernatural communication with the Aurora:

> Some new power it seemed to bring […] A bold thought was sent to my mind; my mind was made strong to receive it.
> "Leave this wilderness," it said to me, "and go out hence."

"Where?" was the query.

[…] I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes; I saw London. (44)

Reminiscent of the moon's maternal summons for Jane Eyre to "flee temptation" (316), Lucy is encouraged by the Aurora to leave that place. Lucy's vision of London and her subsequent trip there establish a contrast with previous episodes since this is the first time that the protagonist actively takes the reins of her future. Prior to this moment encounter with conflict had provoked paralysis and so, Lucy had been shown as the passive recipient of other people's actions. But now that she cannot see any other option, Lucy is finally depicted as ready to take advantage of the potentiality offered by the liminal stage by enacting a "pattern shift" that can be interpreted as a course of "redressive action".[128]

Although still in England, Lucy's arrival in London is the first step in the new "form-of-process" (Greco and Stenner 159) she decides to adopt to escape liminality and put an end to her suspended transition. Being so, since the territorial passage has already started, this first move should be understood as a preparatory rite preliminary to the stage of separation that will be fully completed once she sails. Therefore, due to the ritualistic nature of Lucy's move, its outcome should not be taken for granted. In fact, Van Gennep's concept of "territorial passage" assumes that there is a home to return to (35), very much as Thomassen describes the way out of liminality as "a sort of home-coming" (*Liminality and the Modern* 17), but in Lucy's case there is no home, thus problematizing notions about liminality and successful outcomes. Although Turner's concept of "social drama" allows for the possibility that the

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[128] Lucy's decision to emigrate conforms a "pattern shift" in as much as it implies the assumption of a "new form-of-process", that is, a newly invented rite of passage that differs from other more orthodox patterns in an effort to escape liminality (Greco and Stenner 155).

"redressive action" may fail and the breach and ensuing crisis become re-established, Greco and Stenner do not elaborate on the chance of new "forms-of-process", which need to be of a tentative nature, ending in failure. In this sense, although Lucy's stay in London only represents an early and small stage in her attempt to escape liminality, we can see how her feeling of non-belonging and the consequent "emotional overheat" escalate quickly:

> arriving as I did late, on a dark, raw, and rainy evening, in a Babylon and a wilderness of which the vastness and strangeness tried to the utmost any powers of clear thought and steady self-possession with which, in the absence of more brilliant faculties, Nature might have gifted me.
>
> When I left the coach, the strange speech of the cabmen and others waiting round, seemed to me as odd as a foreign tongue. I had never before heard the English language chopped up in that way […] I managed to understand and to be understood. (45)

Lucy's first stop in her territorial passage represents an encounter with the other and leaves her overwhelmed by the feeling of foreignness she experiences in the heart of her native land, which increases the "affective volatility" associated with the "psychosocial experience" of the liminal hotspot. Lucy's description of her arrival is meant to supply the reader with the same feeling of uneasiness and oppression she is shown to experience through the emphasis in the "vastness" and "strangeness" of the "wilderness" she encounters. These feelings signify not just a physical threat to the protagonist; in addition, they are presented as a risk to her mental and psychological wellbeing, highlighting the dangerous potentiality of affective liminality.[129]

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[129] See the Introduction for a discussion about the dangers of the liminal stage.

Lucy's bewilderment not only stems from her inability to relate to the new landscape she finds herself in, but is also derived from her feeling of alienation from the people she meets. There is no way for Lucy to see in "the cabmen and others" her fellow countrymen because to her their "strange speech" sounds like a "foreign tongue", a fact that stresses her uprootedness even before she reaches Labassecour. As such, the protagonist's territorial passage is elaborated enough to distinguish in it the three stages observed by Van Gennep in rites of passage, thus leading to a reduplication that positions Lucy in a new dimension of liminality, that of the foreigner (11). Struggling to come to terms with the landscape, the people, and the language, Lucy's position as alien comes to the fore and a new encounter with conflict takes place: she feels a foreigner in her native land.

Secluded as she has been said to be thus far, Lucy fails to come to terms with the "vastness" of this open space, and even once she arrives at the inn, a closed and more manageable place, her bewilderment continues: "[i]n London for the first time; at an inn for the first time; tired with travelling; confused with darkness; palsied with cold; unfurnished with either experience or advice to tell me how to act, and yet – to act obliged" (46). Far from Mrs Bretton's and Miss Marchmont's parlours, Lucy is in an unfamiliar environment. However, Lucy's estrangement in London is not only caused by a feeling of foreignness, but also from an unprecedented sense of novelty and lack of experience, presumably the case with most redundant women who decided to emigrate. As an ostensibly middle-class woman, Lucy lacks the male training to deal with the world outside the domestic sphere. Indeed, complaints about female inexperience are common in the Brontës' novels, especially *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and show how gender is a differentiator between female and male initiands which can make the female neophyte's rite of passage more

complicated.[130] In Lucy's case this inexperience is felt all the most poignantly since due to her destitution she has no "ritual elder", appropriate or otherwise, who can guide her out of liminality.

Therefore, Lucy's arrival at the inn in London replicates her earlier encounters with conflict in the novel. It seems that Lucy feels overwhelmed every time she has to be "stimulated into action", "forced to energy" (38), or is "to act obliged" (46), a strain that usually leads to an episode of paralysis:

> Into the hands of Common-sense I confided the matter. Common-sense, however, was as chilled and bewildered as all my other faculties, and it was only under the spur of an inexorable necessity that *she* spasmodically executed her trust. Thus urged, *she* paid the porter […] *she* asked the waiter for a room […] *she* timorously called for the chambermaid [my emphases]. (46)

It is obviously Lucy who performs all those actions; however, she refers to her common sense as a separate anthropomorphic entity by capitalising the noun and giving "her" agency, thus splitting her self in two. This split shows how Lucy "breaks down the material self into disparate parts" (Cohn 50), a pattern that is repeated throughout the novel and which stresses the interaction between social and affective liminality. This split allows the protagonist to go back to her comfort zone: that is, out of focus. By displacing the narrative action onto another agent, Lucy is positioned as spectator rather than active participant: her way of narrating this passage shows her as an outsider to the scene. Lucy thus makes believe that she has been paralysed; she is still the object who would rather go with the flow and have others make arrangements on her behalf.

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[130] See Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. William Crimsworth, for example, is never shown to suffer from lack of experience or advice. On the contrary, his passage is made smoother by other men as discussed in the Introduction.

In fact, as she does with her common sense, Lucy keeps splitting her self in two. On this occasion, the ghostly apparition of her position faces her, reminiscent of the scene where she looks at herself in a mirror at Miss Marchmont's and recognises "a faded, hollow-eyed vision", a "wan spectacle" (36), and anticipating the moment when she actually fails to recognise herself in Labassecour:

> at some turn we suddenly encountered another party approaching from the opposite direction […] I noted them all […] and for the fraction of a moment, believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I was facing a mirror […] dispelled it: the party was our own party. (209, 210)

The Gothic undertones of these splits start in the English chapters and they continue throughout the Brussels – or Labassecourian – chapters. This emergence of Gothic stylistic devices used to explore and represent the divided nature of the protagonist's self and her psychological depth distance *Villette* from the generic realist conventions of the nineteenth-century novel. Even more so, the use of Gothic elements at this point in the novel enacts a further displacement of the domestic, for how can there be domesticity when there is no home? Lucy's homelessness reinforces the transitional, and, therefore liminal, quality of the territorial passage, and her moments of paralysis convey a "static intensity" (Cohn 5) thanks to their Gothic undertone, which helps to emphasise the protagonist's troubled state of mind. With these narrative techniques Brontë dwells on and dilates upon the heroine's suspended transition and displaces the "linear" progress characteristic of the generic *Bildungsroman* (Fraiman ix).

It is on the morning after Lucy's bewildering arrival in London that we see how the potentiality offered by the liminal stage acquires a more positive quality.

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Seeing "THE DOME" from her window Lucy is moved into action: "I had a sudden feeling as if I, who had never truly lived, were at last about to taste life" (48). There is a stark contrast between her feelings of despair and recoil upon her arrival in London and the willingness to explore the city that Lucy expresses the following morning: the shock of paradox and the consequent paralysis seem to have been left behind.

With "[e]lation and pleasure" at heart Lucy walks "alone in London [which] seemed of itself an adventure" (49), an image where Lucy can be regarded as advancing a conflation of the contemporary British explorer and the fin-de-siècle English flâneuse. The "ecstacy [sic] of freedom and enjoyment" that Lucy experiences seeing and feeling London and the "irrational, but […] real pleasure" derived from doing so "utterly alone" (49) seem to reconcile the character with some of the aspects inherent in her position as redundant woman. This scene shows Lucy taking advantage of the potentiality offered by the liminal stage which affords the novice the possibility of disregarding social norms belonging to structure (Van Gennep 114), and thus Lucy embodies a transgressive form of metropolitan femininity who walks the streets "utterly alone". Besides, "the movement through and around London works to locate Lucy as part of the city" (Mathieson 98) and, for the first time in the narrative, "Lucy is physically located within place" (99). In contrast to the comfortable bubble she inhabited at Mrs Bretton's and her invisibility at Miss Marchmont's, Lucy's space finally opens up and she becomes an active agent, if only for a few hours.

Lucy's next "uncomfortable crisis" in this new stretch of her territorial passage takes place even before getting aboard "The Vivid", when she finds herself deserted by the coachmen who "offered [her] up as an oblation, served [her] as a

dripping roast, making [her] alight in the midst of a throng of watermen […] [who] commenced a struggle for [her] and [her] trunk" (50). Female lack of experience strikes the protagonist again: "Three times that afternoon I had given crowns where I should have given shillings; but I consoled myself with the reflection, 'It is the price of experience'" (51). Besides, Lucy's passive role in this episode – she is "offered", "served", and "struggle[d] for" – establishes a parallel with the scene of her arrival in London: in both cases the protagonist is directed and taken advantage of by experienced men who know how to carry themselves in the public sphere.

As Lucy's separation from England progresses and she is immersed in the stage of transition between her country and the continent, with no clearer destination than "the Port of Boue-Marine" (54), she is shown to reflect on her liminal position and the potentiality it entails, thus highlighting the dual nature of liminality. On the one hand, Lucy discloses to Ginevra Fanshawe that she is going "[w]here Fate may lead [her]" since her "business is to earn a living where [she] can find it" because she is "[a]s poor as Job" (55). With this short exchange, Lucy is shown, for the first time in the novel, to share the implications of her position as redundant woman with someone else. On the other hand, and also for the first time, which evidences the potentiality of territorial passages, the protagonist is depicted as entertaining bright prospects about the future, as is conveyed in her daydreaming of Europe, which articulates the potentiality of the passage:

In my reverie, methought I saw the continent of Europe, like a wide dream-land, far away. Sunshine lay on it, making the long coast one line of gold; tiniest tracery of clustered town and snow-gleaming tower, of woods deep-massed, of heights serrated, of smooth pasturage and veiny stream, embossed the metal-bright prospect. For background, spread a sky, solemn and dark-blue, and – grand with imperial

promise, soft with tints of enchantment – strode from north to south a God-bent

bow, the arch of hope. (56, 57)

Lucy's "reverie" offers an idealised picture of Europe as a painting in the making

which is very different from any of the scenes previously described, and it stands in

special contrast to London. Whereas London was represented as "wild" and "vast",

Lucy paints Europe as "wide": a term which also conveys the sense of large space

but is devoid of any pejorative or alienating connotations. Moreover, this suggestion

of a further opening of space is not tinged with darkness but with "sunshine", and the

use of terms such as "gold", "snow-gleaming", and "metal-bright" helps convey the

impression of the character's progress towards light. Lucy's picture of Europe also

projects a rich but tame landscape that stresses the romantic tone of the scene and

culminates with allusions to "imperial promise", "enchantment", and "the arch of

hope", which further reinforce the potentiality of the passage.

However, Lucy discards her painting as soon as she has finished it and

abruptly tells the reader to "[c]ancel the whole of that" upon becoming "excessively

sick" (57). This sudden change in mood during the crossing of the Channel not only

shows the symbolic, and in Lucy's case ironic, relation between England and health

but also articulates the duality and contradictory nature of the liminal stage.[131] The

positive feelings aroused by "the arch of hope" are suddenly replaced by the negative

connotations of "physical discomfort" (Mathieson 100) which advance the "fear and

uncertainty" (Georgsen and Thomassen 206) that await Lucy on land.

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[131] Mathieson argues that "what is interesting about Brontë's evocation of Lucy's seasickness is that throughout the passage there emerges a correlation between the proximity of the continent/distance from England and the growing ill health of the travellers […] in the representational terms of the passage, it is the distance from England and the proximity of the continent that effect increasing levels of physical discomfort" (99, 100).

Upon arriving in Labassecour the main part of Lucy's territorial passage has been physically completed and she becomes a real foreigner. Although it has been argued that at this stage the protagonist becomes "triply displaced and outcast – as Protestant in a Catholic culture, as English person in a foreign place, and as single woman in an environment where marriage is seen as the only natural female role" (Moran 94) – Lucy was already depicted as a foreigner in England, her different faith will not be an obstacle to her social assimilation, and being single would be felt as an inconvenience in England as well.

It is the attribute of foreignness that adds to her already complicated status as orphan, dependent, resourceless, and redundant woman, all traits which position Lucy as disposable, and therefore 'sacrificeable' in Girardian terms. [132] The complexity of her liminal stage strikes the protagonist and expands as the Brussels chapters develop. It is through the interaction of the different characteristics that mark Lucy as a liminar that her suspended transition is shown to become extended as it stretches for the rest of the novel, thus evidencing the Brontës' interest in threshold stages.

Lucy's arrival in Labassecour echoes her first encounter with London thus replicating the conflict that distinguished her previous experience and anticipating the nature of her time abroad. By transferring the experience of alienation from London to Labassecour, Brontë displaces Lucy's destitution at home onto a new territory and maintains the repetitive quality which has thus far characterised the protagonist's behavioural patterns.

> [A]bout midnight the voyage ended. I was sorry: yes, I was sorry. My resting-time
> was past; my difficulties – my stringent difficulties – recommenced. When I went on

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[132] See the Introduction for an analysis of the parallels between Turner's and Girard's theories.

deck, the cold air and black scowl of the night seemed to rebuke me for my presumption in being where I was: the lights of the foreign sea-port town, glimmering round the foreign harbour, met me like unnumbered threatening eyes. (57)

Right at this point in the narrative we can see how the three dimensions of liminality (time, space, and subjectivity) observed by Thomassen are condensed ("Uses and Meanings" 16-18). The fact that the main part of Lucy's territorial passage comes to an end at midnight highlights the in-betweenness of the protagonist's position from a temporal perspective: she arrives in a strange land just at the time in between two different days, a moment in time which marks both an end and a new start, an instance of "death and rebirth" (Van Gennep 182). Moreover, in this passage Lucy is on deck, she has not yet physically touched land in Labassecour, and thus the space she occupies functions as a bridge. She is still inhabiting the limen between England (the ship's name is English) and the foreign land she is about to enter. The fact that Lucy identifies the ship with English territory is further emphasized by the uncommon repetition of the word "foreign" in referring to the "sea-port town" and "harbour". Positioned in a liminal time and space, Lucy's subjectivity also becomes blurred due to her condition as foreigner, and, what is more, an unwelcomed one as she sees it. The anthropomorphic qualities that the night acquires mark Lucy's arrival as an unwanted one, thus jeopardizing her potential assimilation into the new territory. Instead of being guarded by the Aurora Borealis, here Lucy feels "rebuke[d]" by the "unnumbered threatening eyes" she can discern in the darkness.

Due to the condensation of time, space, and subjectivity which is characteristic of the liminal hotspot, and which in this case has been triggered by the liminal attribute of foreignness, Lucy becomes aware of her suspended transition

once she has to leave the ship and immerse in alien territory. This moment echoes previous episodes where the protagonist articulates the precariousness of her situation, thus evidencing the cyclical nature of the narrative: "[y]et where should I go? I must go somewhere. Necessity dare not be nice" (58). In a way that is similar to her soliloquies upon finding herself bereaved and after Miss Marchmont's death, Lucy pauses and thinks about her circumstances and the need to act, something she feels sorry about. Nonetheless, on this occasion the stage of paralysis that liminal hotspots can cause is briefer, and Lucy's reaction more resolute: she must do something. However, this flickering moment of self-assertion soon vanishes once Lucy is reminded "in broken English, that [her] money was foreign money, not current [there]", under "a fitful gleam of moonlight" (58). This detail about Lucy's lack of preparation no doubt echoes the lack of experience and advice she first complained of when arriving in London. By establishing a parallel between both scenes, the author brings to the fore the problematic situation that emigration entails for a generation of women who lacked the knowledge to manage life beyond the parlour and who had no "ritual elders" to guide them out of the liminal stage brought on by the "social drama" of the Redundant Woman debate.

In spite of the uncertainty that marks Lucy's arrival both in London and Labassecour, inns are depicted as providing an escape from the emotional turmoil caused by the experience of the liminal hotspot. In *Villette* inns function as in-between spaces: on the one hand, they are places that allow for stasis while one is on the move; on the other hand, although not a home proper, these locations nonetheless guard Lucy from the vastness of open spaces and the alien territory outdoors, while at the same time making her aware of her position as outsider. Both of Lucy's stays at inns in the novel – in London and Labassecour – follow the same pattern: they

provide a physical shelter and a brief moment of comfort and safety which offer Lucy a pause from her immediate struggles. This allows the protagonist to reflect on her situation: that is, Lucy faces the conflict caused by liminality, manages to articulate it, and resolves on a course of action. In fact, due to the brevity of the respite that inns allow for, Lucy's tendency towards passivity is shown to be cut short in these settings.

After her bewildering arrival in London, Lucy enjoys a brief moment of domestic comfort at the inn: "I kept up well till I had partaken of some refreshment, warmed myself by a fire, and was fairly shut into my own room" (46). However, this room of her own is also a liminal space, a bridge between private and public territories, a place which does not truly belong to her, and so, once she is left alone, the complexity of her suspended transition, marked by so many different liminal attributes, is shown to overwhelm her. In this case Lucy's crisis is also very much caused by the physical exertion and psychological exhaustion she has been subjected to: "as I sat down by the bed and rested my head and arms on the pillow, a terrible oppression overcame me" (46), a recurrent pattern that has led to the argument that Lucy "takes her repose in states of suspended animation that read more like psychological collapse" (Cohn 32). In fact, the protagonist's encounters with the conflicted nature of the liminal hotspot tend to occur when she feels emotionally drained by the reality of her situation. It is at this point of quasi desperation that Lucy is again shown to become fully aware and capable of articulating her liminal status in the following terms:

> All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous, desolate, almost blank
> of hope, it stood. What was I doing here alone in great London? What should I do on

the morrow? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do? (46)

The Gothic undertones of the passage dispel the sense of domestic comfort that Lucy had previously described as she feels suddenly haunted by her own reality. The fact that the protagonist rephrases the fundamental philosophical questions about existence – where do we come from, what are we, where are we going – and adapts them to her own liminal experience is at odds with Gile's argument that the liminal stage provides a privileged point of view in that it grants the neophyte the possibility of looking both backwards and forwards (33). Rather, Lucy's situation can be read as an articulation of the dangerous nature of potentiality in the limen: an indeterminate state where the self can get lost. However, these questions remain unanswered as Lucy "wet[s] the pillow […] with rushing tears" (46), thus evidencing the paralysis that can be caused not only by the conflicted nature of extended liminality, but also by the "emotional overheat" that can result from experiences of suspended transitions.

It is only after her experience of freedom in London and her taste of the positive potential of liminality that Lucy comes back to her "dark, old, and quiet inn" (49) ready to finally enact a "pattern shift", showing how these threshold spaces tend to inspire the protagonist with new courses of "redressive action". Therefore, it is the in-betweenness of the place and of Lucy's situation that brings this new activity for the protagonist, showing how suspended transitions do not preclude development, but rather, are the stages which are the making of the Brontës' protagonists.

My state of mind, and all accompanying circumstances, were just now such as most to favour the adoption of a *new, resolute, and daring* – perhaps desperate – line of action. *I had nothing to lose* […] If I now failed in what I now designed to

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undertake, *who, save myself, would suffer*? If I died away from – home, I was going

to say, but *I had no home* – from England, then, *who would weep*? [my emphases].

(49, 50)

This passage reinforces the parallel that Thomassen establishes between liminality

and homeliness when he states that "[i]f moving into liminality can best be captured

as a loss of home and a ritualized rupture with the world as we know it, any

movement out of liminality must somehow relate to a sort of home-coming"

(*Liminality and the Modern* 17). Given Lucy's homelessness and emotional

uprooting, how can she ever enact a "home-coming"? Being socially redundant and

emotionally alienated, Lucy's position challenges mainstream notions about

liminality in as much as the narrative obscures a fixed point of origin for the

character which prevents the reader from inferring what Lucy's whole rite of

separation has consisted of. This lack of clarity shows Charlotte Brontë investing in

indeterminate states which challenge readers' expectations and make *Villette* depart

from the generic *Bildungsroman*.

   Nonetheless, in spite of the complexity of the protagonist's liminality, here

we find a "new, resolute, and daring" Lucy who is all the same very aware of the

loneliness and destitution implied by her position as redundant woman, a passage

which gives expression to the dual nature of liminality. The characteristic

ambivalence and duality of liminal hotspots identified as "both/and" and

"neither/nor" (Kofoed and Stenner 169) allow us to see here how liminality can

stimulate at the same time "emotions – by generating uncertainty and anxiety – and

reasoning – in searching for a proper way out" (Szakolczai "Permanent (Trickster)

Liminality" 234). Lucy adopts a position close to a feeling of "nothing really

matters" while at the same time she sees a path of "potentially unlimited freedom"

(Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 1). In other words, the paralysis has been overcome and the protagonist is ready to adopt a "pattern shift": enacting a further opening of space, Lucy leaves England behind and starts for the continent.

If Lucy's stay at the inn in London brings forward a turning point in the protagonist's rite of passage, her first hours in Labassecour, which she also spends at an inn, replicate almost exactly the London episode re-enacting the challenges and feelings that she confronted and dealt with in the metropolis. After overcoming the first difficulties of her encounter with true foreignness – language and currency – Lucy expresses "how deeply glad [she] was when the door of a very small chamber at length closed on [her] and [her] exhaustion" (58). Although on this occasion there is no moment of domestic relief – "supper [she] could not take" (58) – we can still see how this in-between space works as shelter from the struggles that have come immediately before.

However, the fact that Lucy has now acquired another liminal attribute allows for understanding this new cycle as a reduplication of her liminal stage. Indeed, the articulation of her situation comes forward in harsher and more poignant terms than ever before, probably due to her being "still sea-sick and unnerved, and trembling all over": "the cloud of doubt would be as thick to-morrow as ever; the necessity for exertion more urgent, the peril (of destitution) nearer, the conflict (for existence) more severe" (58). In spite of the precariousness of her situation in England, Lucy does not fail to realise that being abroad brings her closer than ever to the abyss of utter poverty and exposure, a complication that is to be understood as the main cause for the reduplication of the protagonist's liminal stage both in social and emotional terms. Lucy's position shows the interaction of both types of liminality and how they can influence each other. As a foreigner Lucy acquires the

role of "latest arrival" (Girard *The Scapegoat* 18), thus problematizing her assimilation into the new territory, a situation that is further complicated by her affective destitution, since, at this point in the novel, she is without friends or any type of acquaintance. As the Labassecourian chapters show it is ultimately loneliness, partly caused by social displacement, that has an impact on Lucy's physical and psychological wellbeing.

While inns are represented as shelters from the unknown world outside, they differ from the other closed spaces in the novel in that here Lucy is partially exposed. During her stay at the Brettons' Lucy could remain out of focus and project her narration onto them. Similarly, her time as companion to Miss Marchmont gives narratorial preference to the old lady's ailments and stories. However, at the inn Lucy is on her own, she is exposed to other people's gaze, and, as will happen at Madame Beck's, she is read through.

During her stay in London Lucy somehow manages to displace a more personal account by providing other people's view of her: "I believe at first they thought I was a servant; but in a little while they changed their minds, and *hovered in a doubtful state* between patronage and politeness" [my emphasis] (46). Lucy's social dislocation brings on a collapse of differences similar to the one enacted through the characters of Heathcliff and Jane Eyre. Deprived of any kind of insignia which can offer a clue about a fixed social status (Turner *Ritual Process* 95), Lucy is first taken for a servant and when this assumption is discarded, being at a loss about her social position, she is treated as an in-between individual. In fact, in spite of the protagonist's aversion to disclosing details about her past or her family, there remains in Lucy Snowe some of the social pride first evinced by Jane Eyre, and Lucy

takes pains to give a favourable account of her lineage: that is, she seeks to be anchored in society:

> Having intimated my connection, my position in [the waiter's] eyes was henceforth clear, and on a right footing […] A ready and obliging courtesy now replaced his former uncomfortably doubtful manner: henceforth I need no longer be at a loss for a civil answer to a sensible question. (49)

Only a few hours before, Lucy's position had risen on her "like a ghost" but she is now satisfied that the waiter sees her with different eyes. Although Lucy's social liminality remains the same and her situation has not improved, the fact that she can establish a connection with somebody else shows the importance that affective relations will play in Lucy's life.

However, once she is at the inn in Labassecour there is no possibility for Lucy to hide behind others' accounts. Far from her country, Lucy is sure to meet no one that knows her or her kin and she is read again with the added liminal attribute of foreignness.

> How could inn-servants and ship-stewardesses everywhere tell at a glance that I, for instance, was an individual of no social significance and little burdened by cash? They *did* know it, evidently: I saw quite well that they all, in a moment's calculation, estimated me about the same fractional value […] I would not disguise from myself what it indicated, yet managed to keep up my spirits pretty well under its pressure. (59)

Lucy is aware that her social dislocation is evident to the working classes who are used to dealing with people from all ranks in society. At the inn in Labassecour her (in)significance is read and measured by others in economic terms, an echo of how

'redundant' women were perceived in England by people like Greg. In fact, upon realising that she has spent the night at a "large hotel" rather than a simple inn, she reflects on the contrast between the "broad staircase" and the "great hall" and the "dimensions of the closet assigned to [her] as a chamber" (59). This realization leads Lucy to "[marvel] at the sagacity evinced by waiters and chambermaids in proportioning the accommodation to the guest" (59). Or, in other words, Lucy is surprised at other people's ability to read her, something she does not feel comfortable with and which makes her feel "under pressure".

Besides the function of inns as physical shelters from the vastness outside, the inn in Labassecour also works as a ritualistic portal: there is more to the contrast between Lucy's chamber and the characteristics of the communal areas in the hotel than a hint about the protagonist's social rank or lack thereof. On the one hand, it will be noted that since Lucy's arrival in Labassecour, she has only had contact with men. In fact, upon waking up after her first night at the inn "a tap came to the door" and Lucy "expecting the chambermaid" faces instead "a rough man" (58). On the other hand, Lucy's getting out of her chamber to enter a larger space filled with light and, eventually, a room where there are only men can be read as the protagonist's coming out, that is, her transition from childhood into adulthood:

> as I slowly descended the broad staircase, halting on each step (for I was in wonderfully little haste to get down), I gazed at the high ceiling above me, at the painted walls, at the wide windows which filled the house with light, at the veined marble I trode […] Having at last landed in a great hall, full of sky-light glare, I made my way somehow to what proved to be the coffee-room. (59)

Lucy leaves her small chamber to enter a diaphanous space where light seems to be the most remarkable feature. Everything about this passage from her "closet" to the

"coffee-room" is marked by a sense of ethereal voluptuousness: "the broad staircase", "the high ceiling", "the wide windows" and the "great hall, full of sky-light glare" all work to convey the sense of an opening of space where Lucy is being transported into an other-worldly place, quite different from the various settings which she has been shown to inhabit previously.[133] Indeed, on this occasion, we can see how the protagonist takes time to soak in her surroundings and derives a certain pleasure from them,[134] giving her movements a sensuous cadence: Lucy descends "slowly", "halting on each step" because she is "in wonderfully little haste" to end her way down the "broad staircase" made of "veined marble", a scene which might be read as having sexual connotations.[135]

In this sense, this threshold space represented by the staircase and the hall functions as the setting for a rite of separation from childhood – represented here by Lucy's "closet" – and transition, down the staircase, into adulthood, that is, "the world of sexuality" (Van Gennep 67) evoked by the "coffee-room".

> It cannot be denied that on entering this room I trembled somewhat; felt uncertain, solitary, wretched; wished to Heaven I knew whether I was doing right or wrong […] I should have felt rather more happy if among [the other people] I could have seen any women; however, there was not one – all present were men. (59, 60)

The fact that Lucy has enacted her coming out without any master of ceremonies to guide her is felt by the protagonist once she finds herself face to face with "the world

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[133] This open space contrasts with the cosy but object-crowded house of the Brettons, the "two hot, close rooms" at Miss Marchmont's (37), the vastness and alienation offered by London, the "dark, old, and quiet inn" in the metropolis (49), and the discomfort on board The Vivid.

[134] Although Lucy's rambles in London are also explained in some detail the narrative pace is quicker, giving the sense of an eager child overtaken with "enjoyment". Besides, during her sojourn in London Lucy makes several references to her being alone and does not provide any details about any interaction with people other than with the keeper of a bookshop (49).

[135] In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud states how "[s]taircases, ladders, and flights of stairs, or climbing on these, either upwards or downwards, are symbolic representations of the sexual act" (406) while rooms are usually representative of women (310). Thus, from a Freudian approach, Lucy would be metaphorically having sexual intercourse.

of sexuality". The feelings of uncertainty, solitariness, and wretchedness do not correspond this time to her social destitution, but rather, to her lack of experience and counselling. Lucy's isolation from society and the absence of a mother-figure make her doubtful of the propriety of the step she is taking.[136]

Indeed, this concern of Lucy's shows how deeply impressed Victorian women were with the ideology of the separation of spheres, for, what the protagonist is eventually enacting by entering the coffee-room is transgressing the limits of her 'proper sphere'. The fact that "all present were men" shows how the author has displaced the Victorian coffee-house – public and therefore male – into the inn in Labassecour. By entering this space, Lucy not only fulfils her coming out, but also makes an incursion into a world she does not belong to. However, given her status as foreigner, her eccentricity is accounted for by her being "Anglaise" (60) which shows how liminality can entail empowerment. In her newly acquired status as adult woman Lucy makes another resolution regarding her immediate future: "Breakfast over, I must again move – in what direction? 'Go to Villette,' said an inward voice" (60).

The passage narrating Lucy's way from her chamber to the coffee room, her hesitancy about entering this male space, and the course of action she decides on after breakfast is a rewriting of William Crimsworth's first hours in Brussels:

> when I was dressed and was descending the stairs, the broad marble steps almost awed me and so did the lofty hall into which they conducted […] I repaired to the public room […] I never experienced a freer sense of exhilaration than when I sat down at a very long black table […] there were two gentlemen seated by it […] One

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[136] In the same way as Lucy's coming out is narrated in an oblique and non-celebratory manner, as is customary with traditional rites of passage in the Brontës' novels, so is the allusion to the absent mother made in a similarly subtle fashion. Actually, there is no allusion whatsoever to Lucy's mother in the whole novel. For further reading about the figure of the absent mother in Victorian literature see Bilston and Dever.

of these gentlemen presently discerned me to be an Englishman […] after looking towards me once or twice, [he] politely accosted me in very good English. (49)

William Crimsworth's account is straightforward and matter-of-fact. Even if he is "awed" by the "broad marble stairs" and the "lofty hall", he does not stop. There are no allusions to "halting on each step", he does not pause to take in the surroundings: his movements are certain. Once he reaches "the *public* room" [my emphasis] where two other men are present, he is in the sphere he belongs to and therefore there is no room for considerations about the propriety of the situation. Moreover, Crimsworth is also shown to be recognised as English, but this functions not to mark him as an alien, but rather to establish an interaction with the other members of the public sphere. Furthermore, once his breakfast is over, there is no need for his questioning about his next steps: his path has already been delineated for him.[137] By replicating this passage in *Villette*, Brontë invites a comparison between male and female initands to show the importance of gender in stories of development and how a suspended transition such as Lucy's cannot be told following the same narrative structure that frames William Crimsworth's developmental narrative.

On this occasion, however, the pattern observed so far where Lucy's encounters with conflict result in paralysis and eventually may lead to a "pattern shift" is cut short: Lucy is depicted as a much more active and determined character re-enacting the "new, resolute, and daring" attitude that made her sail for the continent in the first place (49). Nonetheless, the organising principle of the novel, structured by re-enacted sets of actions, is still noticeable although this new mind-set of Lucy's gives the illusion of regained agency and strong will.

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[137] See the Introduction for an analysis on how *The Professor* presents the male sphere as a transnational network of support.

The protagonist decides to go to Villette with the intention of getting a position at Madame Beck's "pensionnat". This trip represents the last stretch in Lucy's territorial passage as well as her most ambitious and focused attempt at "redressive action". On her way to Villette Lucy dwells on the advantages offered by the potentiality of her liminal position:

> I knew I was catching at straws; but in the wide and weltering deep where I found myself, I would have caught at cobwebs […] Before you pronounce on the rashness of the proceeding, reader, look back at the point whence I started; consider the desert I had left, note how little I perilled [sic]: mine was the game where the player cannot lose and may win. (60)

Lucy articulates in this passage the rationale behind her decision to enact a "pattern shift" by stressing the positive potentiality that her desperate situation allows for, and thus, the dual nature of liminality. Having assumed the need for action, this passage shows how the focus of the narrative changes, and the reader is directly addressed by Lucy. This way, the protagonist seems to be anticipating the reader's criticism. Accustomed to Lucy's soliloquies and musings about the precariousness of her situation – passages where the reader has a voyeuristic role in as much as she or he is simply the witness of Lucy's inner struggles – the reader becomes here an active interlocutor directly addressed by the protagonist. [138]

However, Lucy's account of her arrival in Villette puts an end to the active interaction with the reader. In keeping with the pattern by which Lucy faces a crisis every time she arrives in a new unknown place, when she finally gets to Villette, her female lack of experience of the world and her position as foreigner strike again:

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[138] In fact, in *Villette* the reader is directly addressed more often than in *Jane Eyre*.

> And my portmanteau, with my few clothes and the little pocket-book enclasping the remnant of my fifteen pounds, where were they?
>
> I ask this question now, but I could not ask it then. I could say nothing whatever; not possessing a phrase of *speaking* French: and it was French, and French only, the whole world seemed now gabbling round me. *What* should I do? (61, 62)

Lucy's moment of paralysis upon finding herself forced to act but unable to do so due to linguistic constraints is surmounted thanks to the unexpected apparition of a "true young English gentleman" (63) who acts as translator and guides her out of the crisis:[139] a very brief passage which nonetheless shows the Englishman at ease in a strange territory while the woman foreigner struggles with the new milieu. Moreover, this brief mock fairy tale where the seemingly helpless damsel in distress is saved by the knight in shining armour works as the opening for a stage in Lucy's life where her obsession "with finding companionship" (Hodge 906) of a romantic type will be enacted once and again.[140] Thus, once her immediate needs for survival are supplied, Lucy's stay in Villette will be marked by an obvious desire to overcome her affective liminality, showing how "the plot traces Lucy's halting yet persistent attempts to form a relationship of affective reciprocity" (Braun 198).

However, Lucy's emotional destitution will only be conquered if she has the opportunity of establishing meaningful relations with other people, something which is problematized by her social liminality. Lucy stands now for "the other" in this new context and, at first, language will act as a barrier mainly between Lucy and the emotional nourishment she needs. Nonetheless, given the experimental component of the novel, Lucy's 'linguistic alienation' is gradually transposed to the reader, since

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[139] This English gentleman is no other than John Bretton, Lucy's godmother's son. However, the narrator chooses to trick the reader by not disclosing this information until further on in the novel.
[140] The same fairy-tale-like plot line is the basis of the eventual marriage between John Bretton and Pauline.

as the heroine becomes more proficient in French the feeling of foreignness derived from not being able to communicate in the others' language is transferred to the reader. As critics have noted, Brontë makes extensive use of French even in passages that are relevant to the plot. This device can serve a double purpose: it may be a way of conveying a feeling of estrangement to the reader similar to that experienced by the character upon her arrival – since as Lucy's command of French increases so do the passages in that language – or to alienate the reader from Lucy, thus turning the protagonist into a foreigner for the English reader.[141]

Left to her own resources, as opposed to William Crimsworth, Lucy arrives at Madame Beck's by mere chance. This setting, like all settings in Villette, differs from previous locations in the novel which could be specifically categorised as open, closed, or in-between spaces. The Pensionnat is depicted as a fluid space which shares characteristics with previous settings without fully working in the same way, thus displaying the quality of "'both/and' *and* 'neither/nor'" characteristic of the liminal hotspot. The ambiguity of this space has a direct impact on Lucy's behaviour: while the protagonist is shown at times in a lethargic state due to the safety offered by routine and stability, as in other closed spaces, she will also experience feelings of alienation and perplexity more in keeping with open spaces. Moreover, Madame Beck's establishment will also work for Lucy as a threshold between different worlds. Therefore, the "Pensionnat de Demoiselles" in Rue Fossette (literally small fosse) is the most meaningful and challenging setting in the whole novel and at the same time it offers a prime perspective upon the tight connection between the protagonist and space under the circumstances of a liminal hotspot.

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[141] See Longmuir and Buzard.

Run by Madame Beck and her powers for "surveillance" and "espionage", this establishment, which serves both as "a pensionnat and an externat" (72), becomes Lucy's workplace and abode for most of the novel, thus breaking the barrier between household and business from the first moment.[142] Moreover, this space, which is inhabited by a group of people with the characteristics of a closed community, also displays the features of a cloister, prison, and asylum, while at the same time being a threshold between the private and public worlds. This collapse of differences between public and private, secular and religious, and home and workplace taking place at the Pensionnat makes it stand apart from other settings in the novel and endows it with the symbolic significance invested in dwellings in Romantic and Victorian literature. In fact, shortly after Lucy is hired she describes how she is led

> [t]hrough a series of the queerest little dormitories – which, I heard afterwards, had once been nuns' cells: for the premises were in part of an ancient date – and through the oratory – a long, low, gloomy room, where a crucifix hung, pale, against the wall, and two tapers kept dim vigils. (68)

The architectural merging of a former convent with a contemporary building adds to the collapse of differences that the Pensionnat represents. The Gothic features often ascribed to Catholic cloisters are here introduced to describe this "queer" and "gloomy" space, already warning the reader about the possibility of uncanny episodes lying ahead.

The process of amalgamation that this space undergoes has a direct impact on the multiple roles that Lucy is shown to adopt, thus causing her to remain in an in-

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[142] The demarcation of spheres in Victorian times was specially aided by the physical separation of house and business. See Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.

between stage which will trigger the most significant crises that the protagonist experiences. For these reasons, the Pensionnat chapters show a distinct stylistic variety which often displaces realism in favour of Gothic and proto-modernist features in order to convey more adequately the various effects created by the interaction between the different forms of affective and social liminality to which Lucy is subject.

When the neophyte knocks on Madame Beck's door she undergoes the traditional "rite of the threshold" (Van Gennep 21) in a more elaborated way than shown in *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre*. In *Villette* the different stages of "stop[ping], wait[ing], go[ing] through a transitional period, enter[ing], be[ing] incorporated" (Van Gennep 28) that constitute a rite of incorporation into a new territory take longer than in any other of the Brontës' novels probably due to the fact that Lucy is not only a stranger, but also an unexpected visitor and a foreigner.

> No inn was this […] I started […] Providence said, 'Stop here; this is *your* inn.' […] While I waited, I would not reflect […] I rang again. They opened at last. A bonne in a smart cap stood before me […] I believe if I had spoken French she would not have admitted me; but, as I spoke English she concluded I was a foreign teacher come on business […] even at that late hour, she let me in. (64, 65)

For the third time so far in the novel Lucy's course of action is shown to be decided by an external agent rather than by herself, which shows that there is still some reluctance towards assertiveness on the part of the protagonist. In fact, Lucy describes how "Fate took [Lucy] in her strong hand; mastered [Lucy's] will; directed [her] actions" and made her ring the door-bell (64). Here, in the personification of Fate, we see how Lucy's self splits as it did in London: while "providence" tells her to stop, "fate" is shown as acting on her behalf.

Once Lucy has crossed the "the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds" (Van Gennep 20), she goes through a transitional period as she is ushered into a "cold, glittering salon", where, with her "eyes fixed on the door", she waits for "a quarter of an hour" for Madame Beck to appear (64, 65). When the directress of the Pensionnat finally makes her entrance, Lucy describes her as "a motherly, dumpy little woman, in a large shawl, a wrapping-gown, and a clean, trim night-cap" (65), an image far removed from what Madame Beck will soon prove to be: a true mistress of ceremonies who reigns supreme in Rue Fossette.[143] Due to her male attributes as an empowered woman who partakes of both the private and the public spheres,[144] Madame Beck – though not a surrogate for some powerful man as is the case with Mrs Reed or Mrs Fairfax in *Jane Eyre* – is a multifaceted character. She is shown to displace Victorian middle-class ideas of femininity in favour of more manly traits in her role as decisive, resolute, and assertive ruler of the household and business.[145]

Encouraged by Madame Beck's seemingly matronly looks and displaying an unprecedented resoluteness, Lucy decides to tell her a "plain tale" to secure at the very least a lodging for the night: "I told her how I had left my own country, intent in extending my knowledge, and gaining my bread; how I was ready to turn my hand to any useful thing, provided it was not wrong or degrading" (65). So far in the novel, Lucy has only misled the reader in her role as narrator, but this is the first time that she is shown to tell a deliberate lie to another character, something her position as

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[143] The term "mistress of ceremonies" is far from established in anthropology or ethnography. However, although guided by M. Paul and Père Silas at some junctures, it is Madame Beck who sets the rules and directs the establishment and everyone in it. As such, she will try to be Lucy's lead during the latter's stay at the Pensionnat.

[144] Lucy says of her employer: "[a]t that instant, she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's. Power of a particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits" (77, 78).

[145] See Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society" and "Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity" for an analysis of Victorian traits of manliness.

neophyte permits, since liminars are not expected to abide by existing rules pertaining to the social order (Van Gennep 114, 115). Lucy's relief from the physical hardships of her position as redundant woman through what appears to be the right form of "redressive action" is so close at hand that "[w]ith energy, yet with a collected and controlled manner" (66), she keeps pressing Madame Beck to hire her in that same instant.

However, the neophyte, who in this case also assumes the role of "latest arrival", only has her own words to recommend herself. Although so far Lucy has been profiting from the potentiality of her situation in her first encounter with Madame Beck, her social liminality has deprived her of any kind of insignia that attests to rank, which invites Madame Beck and M. Paul to see her as a "*tabula rasa*" (Turner *Ritual Process* 103). It is for this reason that Madame Beck asks M. Paul – "skill[ed] in physiognomy" – to "[r]ead that countenance" (66). Thus in a very short space of time Lucy goes from observing to being observed, from narrating to being read, and becomes a site for ritual. This momentary loss of control is deeply felt by Lucy, who is 'pored over' by M. Paul in a ritualistic way: "he meant to see through me, and […] a veil would be no veil for him" (66), showing how, in *Villette*, "the ability to read faces confers a kind of power" (Cohn 45). The intensity of M. Paul's gaze, the use of the preposition "through", the clear intentionality of the act, and the reference to the veil metaphorically cast Lucy as sacrificial victim, a virgin offered by the mistress of ceremonies to the sage in exchange for wisdom; a scene that can be read as a rape of Lucy's carefully watched privacy or a foretelling of the protagonist and M. Paul's future relationship.[146]

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[146] In relation to M. Paul's stratagems to gain power of vision, Moran contends that "[a]s a Catholic man and violator of the veil, Paul occupies a space normally held by the debauched convent confessor and spiritual director in narratives of cloistered tyranny and degradation" (101).

After the ceremonial reading, Madame Beck decides to accept Lucy as part of the community she controls, engaging her as bonne (67), and thus supposedly completing the neophyte's rite of incorporation into the new territory. This acceptance is firs staged by a physical incursion into the heart of the household: Lucy is "led through a long, narrow passage into a foreign kitchen" and then into "a small inner room" where she has food served (68) – a very common way of showing hospitality as sign of welcoming towards newcomers (Van Gennep 28).[147] The final step in Lucy's reported assimilation takes place when Madame Beck "conduct[s] [Lucy] to an apartment where three children were asleep in three tiny beds" (68) and assigns her the fourth bed (69). This apartment has "an inner door", "the entrance to [Madame Beck's] own chamber" (69), meaning that Lucy will be in charge of Madame Beck's own children and sharing the family's space. This progression from open to closed space creates in Lucy a feeling of safety similar to the one she experienced at Miss Marchmont's, and her sudden change of fortune leads to a soliloquy which this time is marked by gratefulness and wonder rather than perplexity and desperation:

> My devotions that night were all thanksgiving: strangely had I been led since the
> morning – unexpectedly had I been provided for. Scarcely could I believe that not
> forty-eight hours has elapsed since I left London, under no other guardianship than
> that which protects the passenger-bird – with no prospect but the dubious cloud-
> tracery of hope. (69)

Lucy changes here her tone and instead of concern and worry she expresses gratitude for the new status she has achieved. However, what the protagonist is experiencing is an illusion of assimilation. Whereas it is true that she has acquired a new status in a

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[147] Van Gennep notes how these rites of incorporation are shared thus creating a sense of communion (28, 29). However, that is not the case with Lucy Snowe.

social order, many of her liminal attributes remain. Although from a material point of view, Lucy can be argued to have overcome her position as redundant woman, marriage and motherhood, the epitome of Victorian womanhood, remain for the time being out of the question. Moreover, if surmounting material dependence was enough to successfully complete a rite of passage, in as much as it entails a "passage from one situation to another" (Van Gennep 10), the social aspect of the ritual process and the psychological implications of the liminal hotspot would lose their significance. For one thing, Lucy's new status does not erase her condition as foreigner/immigrant (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 7) and "latest arrival". On the other hand, the position she has gained turns out to be "a hybrid between gouvernante and lady's-maid" (71), thus further complicating her situation at Madame Beck's. For these reasons, Lucy cannot be considered to have fulfilled her social rite of passage since her "rights and obligations vis-à-vis others" are not "of a clearly defined and 'structural' type" (Turner *Ritual Process* 95).

In fact, Madame Beck's own reading of Lucy attests to the ambiguity of her position:

> she sat a quarter of an hour on the edge of my bed, gazing at my face. She then drew nearer, bent close over me; slightly raised my cap, and turned back the border so as to expose my hair; she looked at my hand lying on the bed-clothes. This done, she turned to the chair where my clothes lay: it was at the foot of the bed […] every article did she inspect. I divined her motive for this proceeding, viz., the wish to form from the garments a judgement respecting the wearer, her station, means, neatness, &c. […] she counted the money in my purse; she opened a little memorandum-book, coolly perused its contents. (69)

Madame Beck feels the need to assure herself about the adequacy of the person she has trusted her own children to. However, the fact that this examination takes place once Lucy has been admitted shows how she has been "formally invited in, but implicitly cast out" (Kofoed and Stenner 177): that is, she has not been fully assimilated.

Nonetheless, Lucy takes advantage of the potentiality offered by her in-between position which grants her a privileged power for vision:

> what I saw at first was the thriving outside of a large and flourishing educational establishment […] Thus did the view appear, seen through the enchantment of distance; but there came a time when distance was to melt for me, when I was to be called down from my watch-tower of the nursery, whence I had hitherto made my observations, and was to be compelled into closer intercourse with this little world of the Rue Fossette. (75)

Here Lucy is shown to take back the role of proud observer that she had at the Brettons'. Not only does she have an advantageous point of view from her "watch-tower", but she can also learn about others without having to be repeatedly read herself, that is, she does not have to be involved in active, "closer intercourse". In fact, although she describes her tasks as having "neither charm for [her] taste, nor hold on [her] interest", they guard her from "heavy anxiety" and relieve her from "intimate trial" (77). This passive attitude follows the pattern that the protagonist has been showing in closed spaces, where she feels safe from the perils of destitution, making her acknowledge that "[i]nadventurous, unstirred by impulses of practical ambition, [she] was capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses, and making children's frocks" (76, 77). It is for this reason that there is a certain sense of fastidiousness to her being "called down". Actually, such is

Lucy's comfort when allowed to remain in a lethargic state, that when Madame Beck offers her the opportunity to take charge of an English lesson, Lucy only reluctantly accepts (76-78).

This challenge can be interpreted as Lucy's first ordeal as a neophyte under Madame Beck's guidance, and, indeed, it is when the protagonist successfully overcomes it that she can be considered to become completely incorporated in the "little world of the Rue Fossette". Already used to the monotony of the nursery, Lucy suddenly finds herself confronting and confronted by a group of "continental 'female[s]'", a scene which develops into a "growing revolt of sixty against one" (79). Madame Beck's demoiselles do not have difficulty in taking Lucy for what she really is: an outcast, a social inferior, and therefore, disposable (Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 12; *The Scapegoat* 18):

> [i]t seemed that three titled belles in the first row had sat down predetermined that a *bonne d'enfants* should not give them lessons in English. They knew they had succeeded in expelling obnoxious teachers before now […] looking at 'Miss Snowe' they promised themselves an easy victory. (79)

Lucy's first time as teacher represents an instance of power struggle and "status reversals" (Turner *Ritual Process* 166) where different hierarchical systems merge and collapse. On the one hand, Lucy should be able to "command their respect" (78) in her newly acquired status as their superior if only within the classroom limits. On the other hand, the fact that she is a foreign "nursery-governess" (81) makes her lose ground when facing "nobility" (79). However, Lucy's determination makes her successful and wins her promotion to English teacher and a higher salary (81). It is from this point on that the protagonist has a "clearly defined" role with "rights and obligations" that are shared by the rest of the teachers, thus making her part of that

community. That is, her social liminal attributes have been superseded, though not completely erased,[148] and she has entered a new "circle of activity" (Greco and Stenner 150).

The change in Lucy's attitude and disposition further shows that a "pattern shift" has taken place and she has started a new life:

> My time was now well and profitably filled up. What 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 […] *My mind was a good deal bent on success*: I could not bear the thought of being baffled by mere undisciplined disaffection and wanton indocility, in this first attempt to get on in life [my emphases]. (82, 83)

For the first time in the novel, Lucy is shown to have acquired a sense of purpose and has left behind her characteristic passivity, lethargy, and tendency to despair, and, what is more, she derives pleasure from her new course of action. In fact, this is also the first time that Lucy mentions the profits of cultivating one's mind and skills, which finally makes her stand side by side with the rest of Charlotte Brontë's heroines.

When the "enchantment of distance" first evaporates for Lucy and she is called from her "watch-tower" she gets fully immersed in the maze of surveillance that is Madame Beck's Pensionnat. In fact, at this establishment there is more than one "sleepless eye" (409). It is this principle of surveillance, or "espionage" (74), that turns the Pensionnat into a liminal space through a collapse of differences

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[148] While Lucy remains in Labassecour, she will always be a foreigner. The fact that, as in Lucy's or Jane Eyre's case, someone can be assimilated into society while still retaining liminal attributes opens up the possibility that social rites of passage do not only depend on the neophyte's success in overcoming liminality but also on the community's willingness to accept them.

between diverse, clearly demarcated systems of meaning attached to specific institutions. "[T]he spatial 'nesting' of hierarchized surveillance" based on Bentham's model and characteristic of the Foucauldian relationship between power and observation began to be shared by "hospitals, asylums, prisons, [and] schools" (Foucault 171, 172), all of which are places with connotations that are shared by the Pensionnat at some point or other, thus stressing this setting's threshold quality. Moreover, it has been argued that the novel "fuel[s] a negative critique of the suppression of women in a society structured by a panoptic regime of 'surveillance'" (Cohn 33), a fact which problematizes Lucy's rite of incorporation into the community and the assumption that she can be considered an equal.

As Lucy has had occasion to realise already, "Madame Beck ruled by espionage, [and] she of course had her staff of spies" (74). The mistress of the Pensionnat spends her days "plotting and counter-plotting, spying and receiving the reports of spies" (73), which, to Lucy's eyes, makes Madame Beck comprise "[i]n her own single person […] the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police" (74). In other words, Madame Beck is a firm adherent not only of Catholicism, but also of Panopticism – two ideologies that do not really differ in the eyes of the protagonist or the author.[149]

At first, Madame Beck accounts for her modus operandi, based on secrecy, suspicion, and constant observation, only in relation to her students:

> she seemed to know that keeping girls in distrustful restraint, in blind ignorance, and
> under a surveillance that left them no moment and no corner for retirement, was not
> the best way to make them grow up honest and modest women; but she averred that

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[149] In fact when Lucy mentions the "sleepless eye" she is actually referring to Rome (408).

ruinous consequences would ensue if any other method were tried with continental children. (73)

By treating the students as real novitiates, Madame Beck also appropriates for herself the role of mother superior, thus mirroring the spatial merging of convent, school, and prison, and highlighting the "un-Englishness" of all three.[150] Actually, the fact that part of the establishment "had in old days been a convent" (107) creates an atmosphere which not only adds to the sense of constraint and segregation that the students experience, it also provides an uncanny quality that displaces realism and helps to construct a Gothic ambience, while at the same time serving as a critique of Catholicism. Moreover, the fact that students are kept in "distrustful restraint" and "any girl setting foot [in 'l'allée défendue'] would have rendered herself liable to […] a penalty" (107, 108) establishes a further connection between the convent and the prison.[151] In this way, Madame Beck also takes upon herself the role of jailer, a role she fulfils by "mov[ing] away in her 'souliers de silence,' and glid[ing] ghost-like through the house, watching and spying everywhere, peering through every key-hole, listening behind every door" (73).

Although Madame Beck proves capable enough to run her establishment by means of an "exercise of discipline […] that coerces by means of observation" (Foucault 170) due to her being "[w]ise, firm, faithless; secret, crafty passionless; watchful and inscrutable; acute and insensate" (Brontë 74), the Pensionnat is not free from the male gaze. M. Paul turns out to be the voyeur *par excellence*: he watches the students and teachers alike and he has also provided for himself the means of spying even on Madame Beck (365). From his "magic lattice" (365) – "a room […]

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[150] The "un-English space of the cloister" (Moran 78) adds to how "very un-English" Lucy finds the Pensionnat's ways from her arrival (Brontë 70).
[151] For an extended analysis of this connection in relation to *Villette* see Moran.

hired, nominally for a study – virtually for a post of observation" (363) – he studies "female human nature" (363).

However, whereas his phrenological reading of Lucy was openly conducted, his access to this sacred female space represented by the garden is undercover. When he acknowledges that "the garden itself is open to [him]" (365), Lucy tells him how "[t]o study the human heart thus, is to banquet secretly and sacrilegiously on Eve's apples" (366), because what M. Paul is ultimately enacting is a metaphorical rape of the novitiates in his self-proclaimed role as "spiritual director" (Moran 101). The fact that by means of his "penetration[s] through to the recesses of the female psyche", M. Paul feels entitled to "judge and censor, in accordance with male definitions of female decorum" (Shuttleworth 225) positions him as self-appointed master of ceremonies for Lucy, who, according to him, "want[s] so much checking, regulating, and keeping down" (363): that is, Lucy is still perceived as a novice. In this way, Brontë displaces to the continent Victorian ideas about female agency and independence and establishes a parallel between M. Paul and other male characters such as Mr Brocklehurst and St John Rivers, Shirley's uncle and Rev Helstone, and even William Crimsworth. Actually, the fact that M. Paul feels entitled to check, regulate, and keep Lucy down implicitly questions Madame Beck's authority as mistress of ceremonies.

Given the importance of space in the concept of liminality and in this particular novel, the spatial collapse of differences that prevents the Pensionnat from being clearly classified as an open, closed, or in-between space also has the potential to trigger in Lucy episodes of "emotional overheat" and burnouts that reflect her position within a liminal hotspot. Once Lucy is deprived of her privileged position as observer, and aware of the fully operative system of surveillance at Madame Beck's

she tries to avoid being observed: that is, she tries to escape the structure she now belongs to in search for privacy. In this way she looks for places that can shelter her from the system of surveillance and which at the same time provide a sense of comfort and privacy. This move takes her to two distinctly liminal spaces: the alley and the attic.

The alley has a ritualistic character of its own: it stands as a frontier between the sexes and is therefore taboo for the female and male novices alike. Although belonging to the premises of the Pensionnat, "it was forbidden to be entered by the pupils" (107), "seldom entered" by teachers, and "carefully shunned" at night (108). When Lucy decides to "make an exception to this rule of avoidance" it is because she feels attracted by "the seclusion [and] the very gloom of the walk" (108). Therefore, although an open space, its narrowness and neglect (108) convey a feeling of enclosure.

Belonging to Madame Beck's establishment but close enough to the city centre, Lucy can hear "what seemed the far-off sounds of the city" (108): "[t]he same hour which tolled curfew for our convent, which extinguished each lamp, and dropped the curtain round each couch, rung for the gay city about us the summons of festal enjoyment" (108, 109). From the alley, Lucy can feel how two different worlds run parallel to one another without really partaking of either, a position that stresses her uprootedness. Fostered by the spatial and temporal vacuum that encloses her, Lucy's emotional liminality, which she had managed to keep at bay for some time, is exposed:

> A moon was in the sky […] She and the stars, visible beside her, were no strangers where all else was strange: my childhood knew them […] Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past

days, I *could* feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future – such a future as mine – to be dead. And in catalepsy and dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature. (109)

Beholding the family tableau formed by the moon and the stars Lucy feels excluded and regresses to her childhood, of which so little is known to the reader, and which probably was the only time when her emotional needs were met.[152] In contrast to her previous soliloquies about her situation, here Lucy talks about feelings and emotions, thus leaving aside the social plane and showing how, from an affective point of view, Lucy's transition is still suspended. This passage echoes several scenes in *Jane Eyre*, all of which have an especially acute emotional tone. First, Lucy is excluded from the family picture in the same way as little Jane was left out at the Reeds'; secondly, Lucy asserts and vindicates her ability to feel in spite of what she may look like to others, much as Jane does when she confronts Rochester saying "'[d]o you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!'" (251); and finally, Lucy decides to adopt a strategy of self-control to avoid further pain, exactly the same course of action that Jane takes at Lowood. However, in Lucy's case, the references to "catalepsy" and "dead trance" have neurological implications which relate to her psychological condition and which in a way foretell the nervous breakdowns and pseudo-hallucinatory state that she will subsequently experience.

As Lucy's incursions into the alley re-occur, the place progressively acquires a more ritualistic character for her. When Lucy realises that John Bretton's love for her is not what she thought it was after witnessing first-hand his partiality first for

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[152] Cohn aptly notes how "[t]he novel is clear that Lucy has existential needs that go unmet" (43).

Ginevra, and then for Pauline, she decides to bury his letters to mark the death of her illusions and hopes:

> '[t]he Hope I am bemoaning suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome.' Welcome I endeavoured to make it […] In the end I closed the eyes of my dead, covered its face, and composed its limbs with great calm. The letters, however, must be put away, out of sight: people who have undergone bereavement always jealously gather together and lock away mementos: it is not supportable to be stabbed to the heart each moment by sharp revival of regret. (294)

Once Lucy has assumed the death of her hopes for love, that is, the hopes of surmounting her affective liminality, she proceeds with the funerary rites. Still convinced that the alley shelters her from other people's "sleepless eye[s]", she sacralises the space by using it as graveyard for her own feelings:

> I was not only going to hide a treasure – I meant also to bury a grief. That grief over which I had lately been weeping as I wrapped it in its winding-sheet, must be interred […] I thrust [the jar] deep in […] I fetched thence a slate and some mortar, put the slate on the hollow, secured it with cement, covered the whole with black mould, and finally, replaced the ivy. This done, I rested, leaning against the tree; lingering, like any other mourner, beside a newly-sodded grave. (296)

From this moment, the remains of Lucy's first love, or illusion of love, lie buried in "l'allée défendue", and she becomes a sort of widow; her sense of loss adding to her previous bereavements and therefore to her affective destitution and suspended transition. This burial makes the protagonist face her situation, giving way to another instance where she is able to articulate her emotional liminality:

> If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my winter-quarters – to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain. But what road was open? – what plan available? (296, 297)

On this occasion, Lucy does not give in to paralysis. This encounter with destitution directly asks for action, for a further "pattern shift"; and the protagonist is shown ready to "invent" a new rite of passage (Greco and Stenner 155) that can grant her a way out of her emotional stasis – thus evidencing how potentiality is still present even if the liminal stage is caused by affective rather than social destitution. In fact, Lucy's readiness to fight another battle offers a great contrast to her previous encounters with the conflicted nature of liminality in as much as she has abandoned lethargy.

This shift in Lucy's attitude towards liminality, which takes place after a staged burial, runs parallel to Van Gennep's concept of "death and rebirth": Lucy's energies have become exhausted, and she can feel that a new beginning is required, and the alley, with its newly acquired symbolism, is the place to which Lucy keeps turning for a change:

> I went to my own alley […] I paced up and down, thinking almost the same thoughts I had pondered that night when I buried my glass jar – how should I make some advance in life, take another step towards an independent position; for this train of reflection, though not lately pursued, had never by me been wholly abandoned; and whenever a certain eye was averted from me, and a certain countenance grew dark with unkindness and injustice, into that track of speculation did I at once strike. (360, 361)

Here the social and the affective planes collide and interact. Even though Lucy has been assimilated into the social structure, her affective liminality makes her desire a change in her social position. Feeling ignored or mistreated by others, that is, feeling redundant, triggers the need for a new form of "redressive action": a change of place. However, the protagonist is shown to be fully aware, because she has already experienced it, that succeeding on a social level does not necessarily bring emotional fulfilment. Lucy is ready for "self-denial and economy" to accomplish her new "object in life": opening her own establishment (361). Nonetheless, there would be something still missing:

> 'But afterwards, is there nothing more for me in life – no true home – nothing to be dearer to me than myself, and by its paramount preciousness, to draw from me better things than I care to culture for myself only?' […] I suppose, Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded; for you the crescent-phase must suffice. Very good. I see a huge life mass of my fellow-creatures in no better circumstances. (361)

With this interior monologue, Lucy brings into dialogue her emotionally deprived self, and the "I" who "pleads guiltless of […] an overheated and discursive imagination" (12) and who takes pride in her "cool observation" (13). This instance further shows how in spite of belonging to the social structure, the emotional liminality that was triggered by the 'shipwreck' is far from overcome, causing Lucy to still feel displaced.

Together with the alley, the attic is the other space at Madame Beck's where Lucy can have a sense of privacy. First introduced and locked there by M. Paul, this space shares the inhospitable and uncanny characteristics of Charlotte Brontë's most famous attic: the one at Thornfield Hall.

> The attic was no pleasant place [...] In this summer weather, it was hot as Africa; as in winter, it was always cold as Greenland. Boxes and lumber filled it; old dresses draped its unstained wall – cobwebs its unswept [sic] ceiling. Well was it known to be tenanted by rats, by black beetles, and by cockroaches – nay, rumour affirmed that the ghostly Nun of the garden had once been seen here. A partial darkness obscured one end, across which, as for deeper mystery, an old russet curtain was drawn, by way of screen to a sombre band of winter cloaks [...] From amongst these cloaks, and behind that curtain, the Nun was said to issue. (135)

The attic at the Pensionnat resembles distant places: it serves as storage for discarded things, items that need to be kept out of sight, or whose presence needs to be ignored, all of which are characteristics also shared by the figure of the redundant woman, and which make this space a sort of home to the past. However, in spite of the gloomy atmosphere and the uncanny tale about the dead nun, Lucy provides a cool and calm description because she "did not believe this, nor was [she] troubled by apprehension thereof" (135). She is rather more "discomposed" by the "very dark and large rat" that ensues from the cloaks, the "black beetle[s] dotting the floor", and the "stifling heat of the place" (135).

When she goes to the attic for the second time, it is with the object of being able to read a letter from John Bretton without interruption:

> Taking a key whereof I knew the repository, I mounted three staircases in succession, reached a dark, narrow, silent landing, opened a worm-eaten door, and dived into the deep, black, cold garret. Here none would follow me – none interrupt – not Madame herself. I shut the garret-door. (243)

However, as Lucy foretells by means of a phonetic pun,[153] on this occasion "the deep, black, cold garret" will become a threshold between reality and the supernatural. Lucy first hears "as it seemed, a stealthy foot on that floor: a sort of gliding out from the direction of the black recess hunted by the malefactor cloaks" (245). And she then comes face to face with "a figure all black or white; the skirts straight, narrow black; the head bandaged, veiled, white […] a NUN" (245). The quickening pace of the narrative reflects Lucy's excitement and bewilderment in this Gothic scene. Already in a state of "emotional overheat" because of the letter, her encounter with the supposed ghost makes her nerves collapse and the reader witnesses how her nervous breakdown unfolds:

> I cried out; I sickened […] My mortal fear and faintness must have made me deadly pale. I felt cold and shaking […] I panted and plained [sic], almost beside myself. I groped on the floor, wringing my hands wildly […] I don't know what the others were doing; I could not watch them: they asked me questions I did not answer […] 'Oh! they have taken my letter!' cried the grovelling, groping, monomaniac. (245, 246)

Lucy's encounter with the 'supernatural' gives way to a nervous crisis that positions the protagonist "beside [her]self", that is, in a liminal position. The fact that she refers to herself as a "monomaniac" attests to her awareness of the other self that has come forward: her psychologically and emotionally impaired self. In fact, the protagonist's transformation in this scene transcends the limits of the novel itself: rather than Lucy Snowe, we may be seeing Bertha Mason. The image of Lucy "grop[ing] on the floor, wringing [her] hands wildly" recalls the animal characteristics of Bertha Mason on all fours when Jane Eyre first sees her. Thus, the

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[153] The words "nun" and "none" are homophonic.

three dimensions involved in liminality are condensed in this passage with the attic being a threshold between two worlds, time present and past getting merged, and Lucy's subjectivity becoming split.

Nonetheless, Lucy's psyche is depicted as troubled more than once during her stay at the Pensionnat. This endows the place with an asylum-like quality which furthers the ambiguous, in-between nature of Madame Beck's establishment and complicates the protagonist's reactions to it. When Lucy's activity and the lively atmosphere of the establishment come to a halt her mental stability is shown to be more damaged than by the supernatural encounters. In fact, Lucy's emotional liminality triggers a series of nervous breakdowns that turn the Pensionnat into an asylum. When the summer vacation arrives "the house was left quite empty, but for [Lucy], a servant, and a poor deformed and imbecile pupil" (156). It is at this point that the Pensionnat acquires the characteristics of an open space, making Lucy feel alienated and facing a vastness she cannot manage:

> My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords […] How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! How gloomy the forsaken garden […] My spirits had long been gradually sinking; now that the prop of employment was withdrawn, they went down fast. Even to look forward was not to hope: the dumb future spoke no comfort, offered no promise, gave no inducement to bear present evil in reliance of future good […] When I had full leisure to look on life as life must be looked on by such as me, I found it but a hopeless desert. (156)

The fact that Lucy articulates her sense of liminality even if she has acquired a seemingly clear and defined role in the social order brings to the fore the importance of affectivity. With a troubled past she implicitly refuses to disclose, a present she does not feel strong enough to endure, and a hopeless future, the temporal dimension

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is condensed for the protagonist due to her emotions: she exists in an affective void, an emotional limbo.

Indeed, such is the strength of Lucy's sense of her emotional liminality and the "burnout" it generates, that it is this kind of liminality that develops in episodes of mental disorders. Lucy realises that "[her] nerves are getting over-stretched: [her] mind has suffered somewhat too much; a malady is growing upon it" (159). In fact, her mind has been suffering since she was quite young, and this new feeling of desolation brings on an encounter with the long-dead:

> that dream remained scarce fifteen minutes – a brief space, but sufficing to wring my whole frame with unknown anguish; to confer a nameless experience that had the hue, the mien, the terror, the very tone of a visitation from eternity. Between twelve and one that night a cup was forced to my lips […] Trembling fearfully – as consciousness returned – ready to cry out on some fellow-creature to help me […] I rose on my knees in bed. Some fearful hours went over me: indescribably was I torn, racked and oppressed in mind […] Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved *me* well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated. (159, 160)

The horror of this liminal experience is too much for Lucy to handle or to even put in words: the "unknown", "nameless", and "indescribably" acute nature of the terror she experiences is conveyed in more poignant tones than any of her past struggles, including the previous nightmare of the 'shipwreck'. Tended during the night by the servant, Lucy briefly adopts the role of an inmate at an asylum. However, on the following day, she is able to articulate the real fear that lies at the bottom of her nightmare and her affective destitution: "that insufferable thought of being no more loved, no more owned" (160). For Lucy, "stability can only be restored through the heart" (Szakolczai "Permanent (Trickster) Liminality" 234).

The oppressiveness of her own thoughts and the dismal atmosphere at the Pensionnat make Lucy take a step that will lead to another encounter with the preternatural: she enters a Catholic church and approaches the confessional "perishing for a word of advice or an accent of comfort" (161). The confessional in itself is a threshold between the earthly sinners and the holy forgiveness granted by the priest on behalf of God. However, for a Protestant such as Lucy, and someone who is constantly shown to despise Rome's ways, this is also a turning point which represents her inability to cope with her inner struggles and how desperate she is to escape her emotional stasis. Although she feels grateful to the priest for his kindness, the storm within Lucy is as violent as the storm without (163) and "lost", "cold", and "weak" from her psychological turmoil, she "pitch[es] headlong down an abyss" (163, 164) that leads to unconsciousness, a distinct liminal state where time, place, and subjectivity become suspended for the individual.[154]

> Where my soul went during that swoon I cannot tell. Whatever she saw, or wherever she travelled in her trance on that strange night, she kept her own secret; never whispering a word to Memory, and baffling Imagination by an indissoluble silence. She may have gone upward, and come in sight of her eternal home [...] an angel may have warned her away from heaven's threshold. (165)

Lucy's experience of unconsciousness brings forward her spirituality. Rather than speculating about her mind, she wonders about her soul. This split between matter and soul that she acknowledges echoes the split between social and affective liminality that is evidenced through her character. In fact, firm and immovable as her religious convictions are, she pictures her soul starting its own rite of passage: a passage that would culminate with its incorporation in heaven. Therefore, for Lucy

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[154] Lucy's fainting visually and physically complete the Fall she started in entering a Catholic church.

this state of unconsciousness mirrors death, the ultimate rite of passage, and, what is more, she acknowledges her soul's exhaustion, a reflection of the protagonist's own psychological weariness: "I know [my soul] re-entered her prison with pain, with reluctance, with a moan and a long shiver. The divorced mates, Spirit and Substance, were hard to re-unite: they greeted each other, not in an embrace, but a racking sort of struggle" (165). The fact that even in states of "diminished awareness", Lucy's "narration of a life of feeling persists" (Cohn 3, 51) furthers the proto-modernist quality of the novel and adds to the sense of the protagonist's suspended transition from a psychological point of view.

It is the protagonist's fear of not being loved again and the awareness that this fear is causing a part of her to all but wish for death that further shows how affect can be key to an individual's reassimilation into structure irrespective of the social plane. In fact, Lucy is shown to be unable thoroughly to enjoy her new social status while her affectivity remains suspended.

After Lucy's trance, she wakes up "entirely bewildered" "in a very safe asylum" (171): the Brettons' house in Villette. This unexpected encounter is a new trial for her senses which she thinks she cannot trust and leads her to assume she is hallucinating:

> Reader, I felt alarmed! […] these articles of furniture could not be real, solid arm-chairs, looking-glasses, and wash-stands – they must be the ghosts of such articles; or, if this were denied as too wild an hypothesis – and, confounded as I was, I *did* deny it – there remained only but to conclude that I had myself passed into an abnormal state of mind; in short, that I was very ill and delirious. (168, 169)

Lucy's confusion transforms the once safe space that her godmother's house was into a place that induces bewilderment and deprives her of comfort. After Lucy's

nervous breakdown at the steps of the church she is expected to recover in a place that at first she cannot comprehend: "[w]here was I? Not only in what spot of the world, but in what year of our Lord?" (166, 167). Although conscious, the confusion created by this space makes Lucy feel lost in time and space, thus creating an instance of liminality that has the protagonist constantly questioning her perceptions: "I felt sure now I was in the pensionnat" (168), "Am I in England? Am I in Bretton?" (169). It is only when things become clear that Lucy can recover physically and mentally because "[she] felt that [she] still had friends" (178).

Although Lucy's state of mental confusion at the Brettons' places her on a borderline state similar to hallucination, it is later at the Pensionnat that the protagonist actually loses all sense of reality. Being drugged by Madame Beck to keep her under control, as a mistress of ceremonies attempting to break down the neophyte, Lucy feels how "[i]nstead of stupor, came excitement" (449). The "strong opiate" (449) causes the protagonist to experience a split similar to the one she underwent after fainting:

> I became alive to a new thought – to reverie particular in colouring. A gathering call ran among the faculties, their bugles sang, their trumpets rang an untimely summons. Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and adventurous. With scorn she looked on Matter, her mate. (449, 450)

Lucy becomes prey to a variety of stimuli she has never experienced before, and on this occasion it is Imagination that "will have [*her*] will" (450). In fact, once her fancy takes the lead, Lucy is seemingly displaced and shown to lose her agency and will: she becomes subject to the wanderings of her Imagination and from this

moment onwards a state of induced liminality ensues as Lucy is cast into a position

somewhere in between reality and fancy.[155]

> She lured me to leave this den and follow her forth into dew, coolness, and glory.
>
> She brought upon me a strange vision of Villette at midnight. Especially she showed
>
> the park […] What of all this? The park-gates were shut up, locked, sentinelled; the
>
> place could not be entered. Could it not? A point worth considering; and while
>
> revolving it, I mechanically dressed. (450)

It is at this point that Lucy's narrative once again abandons realism and acquires

instead a proto-modernist quality. In dialogue with her Imagination, Lucy's night out

under the influence of drugs is narrated to some extent through instances of internal

monologue, a technique often used throughout the novel, and which shows how

suspended transitions such as Lucy's require stylistic fluidity.

The fact that she has dressed in her "garden-costume" (451) shielded by her

"straw-hat and closely-folded shawl" to avoid being recognised (455) shows Lucy to

embrace liminality: she invests in the ambiguity and uncertainty proper to this stage

for her own benefit. Together with the intentional disguise of her person and

furthering the connection between Lucy and the places she is shown to inhabit

throughout the novel, space appears to her also in disguise. When Lucy finally gets

to the park she does not know where she is because she fails to recognise the place at

first:

> where was I? In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled
>
> with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire
>
> gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of the strangest

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[155] Although drug consumption would be related to the figure of the liminoid (Turner *From Ritual to Theatre* 32, 33) or even the "limivoid" (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 16) Lucy does not take the drug of her own accord or to escape reality.

architectural wealth – of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphynx; incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed throughout the park of Villette. (452, 453)

Like Lucy, the park is also costumed. The exuberance which catches the protagonist's eye fulfils the promise of glory that her imagination has lured her into. Bright colours and lights get mixed with the sensual symbolism of Egypt. However, Lucy soon finds "the key of the mystery" when she realises she is actually in the park surrounded by "paste-board" constructions (453).

At midnight, in a "land of enchantment", and herself under cover, Lucy can welcome the potential afforded by liminality as she regains the power of observation she had once cherished. During her expedition at the park she can observe without being seen the Brettons and De Bassompierres (452, 456-458), and the strange party accompanying Madame Beck and M. Paul (458-467). It is indeed the information that Lucy gains from this escapade that will make things clear between her and M. Paul, finally promising a way out of affective destitution.

Nonetheless, and in a final escape from the generic *Bildungsroman* and its 'compulsory' happy ending,[156] Lucy's is not the only 'shipwreck' that is described in the novel. The protagonist's account of her nightmare is also a projection and foretelling of M. Paul's fate. When she is about to be reunited with Paul Emanuel and thus lead a happy and full life as Brontë's previous heroines have done, a storm makes M. Paul's ship sink leaving Lucy in a state of affective destitution that, I suggest, causes her to remain "stuck" in emotional liminality (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22). Thus the reader is provided with the ending that the author desired for Lucy Snowe:

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[156] Moretti argues that "the classical *Bildungsroman* 'must' always conclude with marriages" (*Way* 22).

by midnight, all sleepless watchers hear and fear a wild south-west storm. That storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder – the tremor of those plumes was storm. Peace, be still! Oh! a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered – not uttered till, when the hush came, some could not feel it: till, when the sun returned, his light was night to some! (495)

Whereas Lucy's first account of a metaphorical shipwreck is rich in minute details about sensory perceptions, here we find a much more epic tone. Everything about this storm of biblical proportions is grand. In contrast with the personal, narrower, and subjective point of view of the former description, this tempest is depicted with a focus on nature and its destructive force, thus eliminating all hope of Lucy's reunion with M. Paul. In this account the focus opens up, and the perspective seems to be from above rather than from below: whereas Lucy's nightmare conveys the point of view of someone who is in the water, M. Paul's shipwreck is depicted from a position that allows for a general view of the scene. Not only that, but the allusions to "all sleepless watchers" and "a thousand weepers" betray Lucy's shift from first-person to omniscient narrator, thus reinforcing at the very end of the novel her problematic position as reliable narrator.

This pairing of 'shipwrecks' wraps up *Villette* – and therefore Lucy's story – with loss and affective destitution. With M. Paul dead, Lucy Snowe's position is a replica of Jane Eyre's upon the discovery of Rochester's marriage to Bertha Mason: "Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent expectant woman – almost a bride – was a cold solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate" (293). The passage in *Jane Eyre* could be applied word for word to Lucy's position. This regression

from "expectant woman" to "*cold* solitary girl" [my emphasis] cannot be read as Lucy's completion of her rite of passage no matter how different her social status may now be – she is now a self-supporting working woman. This second emotional 'shipwreck' positions Lucy on a new threshold – she is "almost a bride" – and takes the character back to her starting point of affective destitution, thus precluding the possibility of escaping redundancy from an emotional point of view. By re-enacting the first nightmare under similar circumstances the protagonist goes back to the point where she may ask again "to whom could I complain?" (35).

CODA

This dissertation has shown that stories about suspended transitions are at the core of the Brontës' mature prose. Those indeterminate, in-between states that Wilhelm Dilthey refers to as "transitions" (336) in his formulation of the generic *Bildungsroman*, and which in Arnold van Gennep's theories about rites of passage correspond to the liminal stage are the making of the Brontës' protagonists. This distinct feature in the sisters' novels challenges traditional patterns of developmental narratives and proposes moments of suspended transitions as the actual growth points in an individual's rite of passage since, as my analysis of the novels shows, the liminal stage does not prevent development.

The experience of liminality, then, is what lies at the centre of the Brontës' novels and what grants the protagonists – with the exception of Lucy Snowe – a successful reincorporation, both in social and emotional terms, which does not involve renouncing one's identity, something which the generic *Bildungsroman* asks for (Lukács 136; Moretti *Way* 21). Moreover, I have shown how the liminal stage, thanks to its potentiality, allows for the possibility of an exercise of radical empowerment which implies rebelling against the status quo. It is precisely these acts of rebellion that are shown to make the Brontës' protagonists mature and eventually become assimilated in their own terms. Consequently, if Lucy Snowe cannot be argued to become fully reincorporated, it is due to her 'passive' and more 'lenient' attitude towards the normative social order.

Since the Brontës devote their novels to exploring and representing indeterminate states, it may be worth considering whether this feature also applies to their poetry. To elucidate this, I will analyse Emily Brontë's "A little while" (1838) applying the same theoretical framework I have used to study the novels to examine

to what extent the experience of liminality is also captured and conveyed through her poetry and to consider what, if anything, it may enable her to say about the nature of suspended transitions that is not sayable through the form of the novel.

Emily Brontë was a prolific poet and Charlotte immediately identified in her sister's poems "a peculiar music" (C. Brontë "Biographical Notice" xliv). However, Emily was a poet who wrote for herself and Charlotte's "Biographical Notice" suggests that she did not have the intention of making her verses available to the public. These poems have been therefore considered as the key to "the recesses" of Emily's "mind and feelings" ("Biographical Notice" xliv) and thus have an intimate tone, "at once personal and impersonal" (Gezari *Last Things* 2). Furthermore, while Charlotte kept a journal, and she and Anne were eager letter writers, there is barely any trace of Emily's personal writing apart from the 'time-capsule diary papers' she was in the habit of writing with Anne. It is for these reasons that Emily's poetry has an especially relevant value – apart from its indisputable artistry – also at a biographical level.

Scholars of Emily's poems have traditionally signalled the Romantic and mystic flavour of her verses, and echoes of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, or Shelley are usually mentioned.[157] The force and vividness with which Brontë depicts sublime nature,[158] and the complexity of the feelings and experiences she manages to capture in words (Gezari "Poetry" 139) are also hallmarks of her poetry. Nonetheless, my choice of "A little while" has been guided by the moment in life Emily was going through when she wrote it.

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[157] See Gezari, *Last Things*, and O'Neill. See also Homans, and Vine for what they understand as a problematic relationship between Emily's poetry and Romanticism.
[158] Janet Gezari contends that in her poems, Emily "represents the ecstatic release associated with mystic experience more enduringly than the Romantics, but she is also more at home than they are in a natural world unimbued with moral significance" (*Last Things* 3).

In 1838 Emily was working as a teacher at Law Hill school near Halifax. Emily's aversion to being away from Haworth is well-known to Brontë scholars, and on the few occasions that she had to leave the familiar surroundings, Charlotte did not fail to mark how her sister declined (Barker 31-32, 59). Therefore, "A little while" was written, as the poem shows, at a time when Emily found herself experiencing a suspended transition. Unlike Charlotte or Anne, Emily did not regard obtaining a position as an end in itself, and therefore, as a stage comparable to arriving at a point "of a clearly defined and 'structural' type" (Turner *Ritual Process* 95). Rather, having to be away from home represented a disruption of the "everyday", that "world of confidence, familiarity, and routine actions" (Kosík 43). Looking at Emily's experience through theories about the ritual process, we can identify her departure from Haworth as the rite of separation, her stay at Law Hill as a liminal phase, and her "home-coming" as her way out of liminality (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 17). It is the experience of liminality she was undergoing at Law Hill which, I argue, is the fabric of this poem.

Emily's time at Law Hill – as her time at Roe Head in 1835 – can be described as a liminal stage especially characterised by a sense of displacement and emotional dislocation, something which the poetic persona expresses through allusions to imprisonment. Feelings of homesickness pervade a poem which proposes strategies of escapism through imagination to overcome liminality, the poem itself being one such strategy.[159]

> A little while, a little while,
>
> The noisy crowd are barred away;
>
> And I can sing and I can smile

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[159] See Austin for an analysis of the poems Emily wrote at Law Hill through the principle of association.

A little while I've holiday! (1-4)

The first stanza shows how the potentiality offered by the liminal stage can awaken the liminar's creative potential (Turner *Ritual Process* 128): while the poetic persona feels free to "sing" and "smile", the poet has the time to write. Moreover, by focusing on this "little while" we can see how the "hour of rest" (47) becomes a moment of stasis that allows for some respite from the "emotional overheat" caused by the experience of the liminal hotspot (Szakolczai "Permanent (Trickster) Liminality" 231). Once "The noisy crowd are barred away" the poetic persona goes through a moment similar to Cohn's notion of "suspension", which the critic understands as an "exemption from action that holds force at bay [which] ascribes to the constrained and determined body a hovering lightness that cannot last" (f.n.16, 198).

Furthermore, this poem, I suggest, shows the three dimensions of liminality (time, space, and subjectivity) identified by Thomassen condensing ("Uses and Meanings" 16-18), thus stressing the suspended transition of the poetic persona. First, it has been argued that in her poems, Emily tends to "consecrat[e] a moment, a feeling, or a sensory impression" (Gezari *Last Things* 3). This "consecration" of time can be seen as having a ritualistic character in as much as it turns the "holiday" into a quasi-sacred moment of trance when the poet stands "with raptured eye / Absorbed in bliss so deep and dear" (45-46). This "little while" therefore acquires a liminal quality of its own thanks to its "dream-like charm" (35) and depicts the poetic persona in a state of acute sensory awakening which represents a bridge between two different realms: reality and imagination.

Moreover, the poet uses this liminal moment to try and escape her "dungeon" (44), a term which, together with the allusions to bars (2, 44), endows her

surroundings – probably Emily's room at Law Hill – with a Gothic quality that depicts the poetic persona as prisoner – "I hear my dungeon bars recoil—" (44). It is through "fancy's power" (43) that the 'prisoner' tries to escape "truth" (43), thus turning "the naked room" (25) into a threshold space which appears at once as constraining and liberating, enclosed and open: both a prison cell and a portal through which to enact an escape through the senses.

Nonetheless, the line "Where wilt thou go, my harassed heart?" (5) focuses on a strategy of evasion through feeling rather than through thought. By displacing the powers of the mind, which the author honours in a later poem entitled "To Imagination" (1844), and giving relevance to the heart as a way out of liminality, the emotional dimension of the author's dislocation is reinforced, thus showing how the source of the poetic persona's suspended transition is psychological rather than social. In fact, the use of metaphors obscures any hint about the poetic persona's relation to structure in social terms: "A little while" is all about the "complexity of the feelings and experiences" that Gezari identifies in Emily's lyrical oeuvre.

Moreover, by splitting herself and treating her heart as a separate, independent entity, the author's subjectivity becomes "undifferentiated".[160] This split identity grants a power of vision proper to the potentiality offered by the liminal stage.

> Full many a land invite thee now;
>
> And places near and far apart
>
> Have rest for thee, my weary brow. (6-8)

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[160] Gezari notes how "[w]hat Brontë seeks isn't union with a transcendent deity but release into a state of undifferentiation where the subject is identified with its object" (*Last Things* 3).

Once the body is transcended, the poetic persona can choose where to go, thus showing how liminality can also be a liberating, empowering stage, something which most of the Brontës' novels also represent through their protagonists' suspended transitions.

> Shall I go there? or shall I seek
>
> Another clime, another sky,
>
> Where tongues familiar music speak
>
> In accents dear to memory? (21-24)

The different scenes that come to mind are in some way or other all "dear to memory", a familiarity that endows the "clime[s]" and "sk[ies]" that function as an escape with domestic connotations that represent a stark contrast to the "dungeon" that in this poem stands for "truth". In fact, far from the untamed nature more characteristic of Emily's writings, the two landscapes invoked during this "holiday" are to some extent domesticated, 'made a home of', thus stressing the author's feeling of homesickness.

If the first vista opens with "a spot 'mid barren hills / Where winter howls and driving rain" (9, 10), we are soon assured that "if the dreary tempest chills / There is a light that warms again" (11, 12), thus displacing the discomfort of nature and replacing it with "the hearth of home" (16). This image of domesticity as shelter from nature is very far from the domestic chaos that pervades *Wuthering Heights*, where the house indeed offers little solace from the tempest outside: in fact, it is on the night that Lockwood has to stay at the Heights due to a blizzard that he has the nightmare with Catherine's ghost. In "A little while", however, the author seems to crave domestic bliss and wonders "what on earth is half so dear, / so long for as the

hearth of home?" (15, 16), a longing which stresses the feeling of emotional dislocation and culminates in the utterance "I love them—how I love them all!" (20).

The two different scenes that this poem depicts as a means of escape from the feeling of emotional dislocation are separated by a brief return to reality:

> Yes, as I mused, the naked room,
>
> The flickering firelight died away
>
> And from the midst of cheerless gloom
>
> I passed to bright, unclouded day— . (25-28)

From a scene brightened by the "hearth of home", the poetic persona suddenly comes back to the "cheerless gloom" of her "naked room", a sudden contrasting insertion that maintains the Gothic quality of reality throughout the poem. Nonetheless, this 'interruption' in the poet's musings is brief, and she is almost immediately able to "[pass] to bright, unclouded day", using again references to light in order to mark the difference between reality and imagination.

While the first scene takes the poetic persona to a familiar, domestic environment, the second landscape that the "heart" visits is rich in pastoral undertones:

> A little and a lone green lane
>
> That opened on a common wide;
>
> A distant, dreamy, dim blue chain
>
> Of mountains circling every side;
>
> A heaven so clear, an earth so calm,
>
> So sweet, so soft, so hushed an air. (29-34)

Nature is again depicted in a way that departs from Emily's characteristic sublime visions and instead acquires an embracing and comforting quality. The "bright, unclouded day" and the "green lane" convey a sense of light which stands in especial contrast to the image of the "dungeon" where the poetic persona is kept 'prisoner'. Moreover, the "dreamy" quality of the "blue chain / Of mountains" adds to the sense of trance that the speaker is experiencing, and represents this escape from reality as an imaginary, temporal evasion from liminality. This sense of comfort is reinforced through the reiteration that "heaven" is "clear" and "earth" is "calm". This feeling of calmness is further conveyed through the alliteration in the next line, where the repetition of sibilants helps to highlight the peacefulness that the speaker is experiencing.

Although there is no allusion to "home" in this second scene, the poetic persona nonetheless acknowledges that "That was the scene; I knew it well" (37). It has been suggested that this sense of familiarity is due to the fact that "[t]his vista may be a glimpse of Gondal" (Austin 587). If such is the case, and it is well known that Emily's mind dwelt in Gondal as much as in the real world,[161] the feeling of homesickness derived from the poet's 'imprisonment' not only alludes to her earthly home, but also to the imaginary kingdom of her mind. Therefore, the author's identity also becomes split in this poem: there is a personal, earthly longing, and a creative one probably due to the "weary care" (48) that prevents the poet from giving free rein to her imagination.

"A little while", then, depicts a momentary escape from the emotional liminality that the poetic persona is undergoing, a brief and ephemeral evasion from the experience of her suspended transition which is conveyed as an imprisonment. In

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[161] During a brief holiday with Anne in 1845, Emily was immersed in impersonating the Gondal characters (Barker 131).

devoting a poem to the respite from liminality offered by imagination, we can see how Emily Brontë places at the centre the potentiality offered by this threshold stage which, in this particular case, has a more poignant effect on the emotional and psychological dimensions.

In placing potentiality at the centre, the whole poem becomes an articulation of the experience of the poetic persona's suspended transition. In fact, the poem does not aim at representing a complete rite of passage, as opposed to the Brontës' novels, which at least tend to represent the rite of reincorporation. On the contrary, the poetic persona remains "stuck" in liminality (Thomassen "Uses and Meanings" 22).

Since "A little while" begins and ends with allusions to "bars" and, therefore, to imprisonment, the poem does not propose a way to fully overcome liminality, it just offers a brief respite from it: "a hovering lightness that cannot last". For this reason, this poem remains the representation of a 'vicious circle' which is 'condemned' to repeat itself. While *Wuthering Heights* depicts Heathcliff's full rite of passage and therefore traces a path from one point to another, no matter how tortuous that path is, "A little while" offers a circular, cyclical trajectory where liminality is both origin and destination.

Therefore, in spite of the positive potentiality that the poem both represents and depicts, "A little while" fails to propose a definite "home-coming": it only affords an illusion of reintegration. The poem's complete investment in the representation of an experience of suspended transition, then, distorts the transient quality of liminality and instead presents it as a definite state. For this reason, "A little while" departs from representations of suspended transitions in the Brontës' prose, where indeterminate states are depicted as empowering and key for the individual's maturation. This poem, instead, traces no progress or development, and

in so doing, it diverges from the notion present in most of the Brontës' novels that suspended transitions can be eventually successfully overcome. The lack of ritual progress in Emily's verses, as opposed to the novels, suggests that although the interest in representations of suspended transitions remains a constant in the Brontës' writings, lyricism, as Cohn notes, may especially invite the blockage or deferral of individual self-formation (4).

Nonetheless, in spite of the differences between narrative and lyrical accounts of suspended transitions analysed in the works of the Brontës, I have shown that liminality remains a valid concept to explore woman's writing in a more comprehensive, fluid way than that afforded by prescriptive notions and closed categories such as "*Bildungsroman*", "anti-*Bildungsroman*", "novel of awakening", etc.[162] Actually, I suggest that this approach may result in more nuanced analyses that bring into sharper critical focus what is distinct about the female experience in developmental narratives.

In fact, this dissertation has shown that in eschewing attention to traditional rites of passage and dilating instead upon suspended transitions, the fiction of the Brontës demonstrates a distinctive approach to the Victorian narrative of female development that is an important part of their achievement as women writers.

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[162] See Lyons for a recent revision of the theoretical debate around the concept of the *Bildungsroman*.

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