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Performing Female Identities: Gender Performativity in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

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ENG-3992

Master's Thesis in English Literature

May 2016



Abstract

This thesis analyzes how Charlotte Brontë uses theatrical performances as narrative techniques in her novel *Villette* (1853). The thesis looks at three different kinds of performances found in the novel: the On-Stage and Off-Stage acting performed by the younger focalizer in the embedded narrative, as well as the Narrative Performance that is ‘performed’ by the older narrator in the frame narrative. All three kinds of acting are included because they are each important for understanding how Brontë constructs and portrays a female identity that critiques and subverts 19th Century conventional ideas about women. The thesis discusses how several Brontë critics claim that the theatricality that permeates the entire novel served to subvert general established ideas about female identity found in the 19th Century. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to investigate whether or not some often discussed theatrical episodes, or scenes, in *Villette* can still be considered subversive acts, or if they must be viewed slightly different than what previously Brontë critics have done. The thesis uses Judith Butler’s theory on gender performance and identity formation to support the argument. This thesis will argue that what gives *Villette* its subversive potential is the “doubleness” that Brontë uses when describing characters and scenes, as well as when she constructs her narrative.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Stephen Wolfe for his excellent help and support during the writing of this thesis. Thank you for all the constructive feedback, inspiring words and good advice that I received during this process.

I would also like to thank all of the teachers I have had in both my BA and MA program here at UiT, The Arctic University of Norway for introducing me to so much wonderful literature that has opened up a whole new and exciting world for me.

I would like to thank my mom and my late father. Thank you for providing me with shelter and transportation when needed and for not giving up on me.

Finally I would like to thank my boyfriend Torjus for taking the time to read through my thesis and check for spelling and grammar mistakes, but mostly just for being supportive when needed and for always believing in me.

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Introduction

This thesis will look at identity and gender as various performative acts in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette* (1853). Performance and acting, or theatricality¹ in general, permeates the whole text of *Villette*, both on-stage and off-stage, and this thesis will firstly have a closer look at the connection between acting and gender performance and secondly what role, if any, gender plays on the formation of identity and the subject. I will show how different acts and characters can create a tension between the feminine and the masculine, as well as show how gender was perceived in general in the 19th Century.

The theater was a central part of social life in 19th Century society. People enjoyed going to the theater to watch plays for the sake of pure entertainment, however, also theater performances with more serious, or “moral”, messages were popular. Short versions of popular plays were sold for people to read in their leisure time, and people arranged private performances of plays in their own homes for the sake of entertainment. It is no coincidence, then, that this great interest in the theater would be central to the plot of many novels from the late 18th Century throughout the 19th Century. The characters in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), for example, arrange a private theater performance at home. In addition, popular novels were often adapted for the stage as well, and Charles Dickens was known to adapt many of his own novels for the stage. Charlotte Brontë also belongs to the many novelists who included performance and theatricality in their novels, and there are several examples of acting and performing in all of Brontë's novels, especially in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette*.

¹ In his book *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (1992), Joseph Litvak differentiates between “*theater*, which may denote a fixed place, institution and art form, and *theatricality*, which resists such circumscription”, thus he uses the word *theatricality* as a trope, and the word is “directed not only against the coherent, stable subjectivity that the nineteenth-century novel supposedly secures for both its protagonists and its readers, but also against the domestic, domesticating closure (...) in which that subjectivity supposedly discovers its “natural” habitat” (*Caught in the Act* introduction xii). In other words, his use of the word includes acts that portray an ambiguous nature within certain characters and also about the veiled and ambiguous language that is sometimes used at the end of certain novels to resist traditional closure.

However, Brontë's use of theatrical performances and language is slightly different in each novel. It is only in *Villette*, though, that the theater and its extended metaphor, theatricality, play such a central role for the development of the story and the structure of the plot.

Villette is Charlotte Brontë's most introspective novel, and by far her best one. It is also the first and only novel that she wrote without the company of her siblings. The three sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, wrote all of their novels while sitting in the same room, and they quite frequently read and discussed their writing with each other. In all of their juvenilia; the childhood stories, plays and poems, the three sisters, as well as their brother Branwell, were influenced by each other's writing. The sisters were also influenced by each other in the novels that they later wrote; with the exception of one novel, namely *Villette*. When Charlotte started writing the preceding novel, *Shirley* (1849), all of her siblings were still alive. By the time she had finished it, they were all dead. *Villette*, then, is the only novel by Charlotte Brontë written entirely alone, and to me, this in itself makes the novel a very interesting one. All alone, and without her literary companions to rely on, Charlotte's writing turned inwards, and *Villette* keeps a solitary tone throughout the entire novel. The introspective focus in the novel makes it one of the first *modern* novels of the 19th Century and both thematically and structurally it shows Charlotte Brontë to be ahead of her time. Yet, at the same time, her use of performances and theatrical language shows that she was very well aware of popular culture around her and what would be of interest to the general public.

Several Brontë critics, such as Joseph Litvak and Lisa SurrIDGE, have both pointed out the obvious references to the theatre in *Villette*. In addition, they draw a connection between these acts and feminism, or gender performance, and the subversive potential of these acts in 19th Century society. Although these critics agree on the connection between theatre and feminism in Brontë's novel, they have different approaches to it. Whereas SurrIDGE focuses mostly on the obvious theatre scenes in the novel, dedicating most of her essay to the 'Vashti'

chapter, Litvak's emphasis is for the most part on the non-theatrical scenes that occur in the novel, drawing a connection between teaching and governing, and the role Lucy plays in the classroom. Although both SurrIDGE and Litvak briefly mention some of the narrative performances by the older Lucy Snowe, neither of them elaborate on this point. I believe that all three kinds of acting must be seen in relation to each other to fully understand Lucy's personality and the subversive potential that Brontë's novel had in 19th century society, and for this reason my thesis will include both the on-stage and the off-stage acting of the younger Lucy Snowe (the embedded narrative), but also the narrative performance that is "performed" by the older Lucy Snowe as narrator (the frame narrative).

Gillian Beer notes in her essay "'Coming Wonders': uses of theatre in the Victorian novel" that: "Charlotte Brontë was the most introspective of all Victorian novelists" (Beer 185). It is also this introspective focus in *Villette* that is the main discussion in both SurrIDGE and Litvak's essays. Lisa SurrIDGE has written several books and articles on 19th Century Victorian literature. In her essay "Representing the 'Latent Vashti': Theatricality in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*" (1995), SurrIDGE writes that Charlotte Brontë uses "theatricality to suggest *latent traits* [such as fear, desire, passion or rebellion] in [the] female character" (4, my emphasis), and she claims that the actress Vashti acts out Lucy's subversive impulses. Further, SurrIDGE draws a connection between theater and women and says that "the theatre scenes in *Villette* derive much of their revelatory power from contemporary anxieties concerning women and acting" (5). She then points out that the stage was an area of special dispensation from the normal categories, moral and social, that defined a woman's place (5).

According to SurrIDGE, one episode that brings out a hidden side in Lucy is the school *vaudeville*, in which, instead of sticking to the script, Lucy alters the role of the play. SurrIDGE writes that "the school vaudeville dramatizes latent desires and hostilities among Ginevra, Lucy, Dr. John, and de Hamal" (5), and that "drama enables Lucy and Ginevra to undo the

romance conventions which burden them both” (6). SurrIDGE adds that: “The vaudeville in *Villette* thus lifts social constraints, subverts gender identity, and disrupts conventional romance plotting” (6).

Several critics of *Villette* have pointed out the significance of the cross-dressing scene in connection with the school vaudeville, and SurrIDGE is no exception. However, SurrIDGE claims that many critics ignore the significance of the layering of Lucy’s clothes, equating Lucy’s dress with simple transvestism. Here SurrIDGE also points out an interesting fact about 19th Century stage conventions, saying: “In Victorian theatre, cross-dressing – almost unheard of in everyday life – was common” (6). Women cast in men’s roles often wore men’s clothing on-stage. Sometimes this was done for comedic effect, however, as SurrIDGE points out, the sight of women in men’s tights or trousers undoubtedly had erotic overtones. SurrIDGE writes that: “on the one hand, a cross-dressed actress could be seen as discarding the restrictions of feminine dress in favor of masculine garments symbolizing power and authority” (6).

However, Tracy Davis argues that, on the other hand

(...) the actress’s gender role was confirmed rather than confused by cross-dressing.

Indeed, many transvestite stage costumes did not attempt to sustain the illusion of masculinity; rather they actually emphasized a feminine shape through the use of corsets and garments flared at the hips. “[T]he point of women’s cross dressing,”

Davis concludes, “was to please, not deceive” (Davis 113-14, cited by SurrIDGE 6).

In light of this, SurrIDGE sees Lucy’s refusal to wear men’s clothing as Lucy’s refusal to be objectified. However, she points out that the reason that Lucy chooses to wear some masculine clothes could be because this would allow her to “assume symbolically the traditional masculine powers of speech and sexual assertiveness without this attendant

liability” (6). I will discuss Lucy’s performance in the school *vaudeville* and the significance of the layering of her stage garments in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Another important episode that SurrIDGE mentions in her essay is what she calls “the second eruption of theatre in the novel” (7), and here she refers to the ‘Vashti’ chapter. SurrIDGE writes that this episode is marked by a tension between fear and desire, but the difference here is that Lucy is in the audience, not on stage. Her emotional response, however, is stronger and more ambivalent. Lucy’s ambiguous reaction to Vashti is puzzling, and it shows Lucy’s split nature: “It was a marvelous sight: a mighty revelation. It was a spectacle low, horrible and immoral” (Brontë 286). Lucy’s choice of words to describe Vashti’s acting reveals to the reader Lucy’s divided feelings towards the actress. Lucy’s fascination with Vashti’s performance in the first sentence is reversed in the second one, so that at this point the reader is not quite sure how Lucy feels about the actress. Lucy’s divided nature will be a central topic throughout the entire thesis, and I will discuss two kinds of doubling; the *doppelgänger* in Chapter 2 and the use of the double narrative when constructing the character of Lucy in Chapter 3.

The ‘Vashti’ chapter focuses on Lucy as a member of the audience rather than the cast, and in this chapter, according to SurrIDGE, “Brontë raises an issue with which feminists are still grappling – that of female spectatorship” (7). Here she mentions Laura Mulvey, who, in theorizing the gaze, “has described the viewer as active/masculine and the viewed object as passive/feminine” (7). SurrIDGE here shows that in both this scene, and in the art gallery scene, issues of objectification, commodification, and female spectatorship are brought to the fore, and that “Lucy moves from constructing her gaze as male (approving “that which was considered orthodox to admire” (Mulvey 283 cited by SurrIDGE 7)) to formulating a female way of looking” (7). SurrIDGE adds that Lucy “displays the self-possession of a woman who refuses to be made complicit in constructing the female body as erotic/art object” (7).

The difference between the male gaze and the female gaze becomes evident when we compare the ‘Vashti’ chapter with the ‘Cleopatra’ chapter. In the ‘Cleopatra’ chapter, Surridge writes, Lucy refuses to see the picture of the woman as an object of desire, and “instead of acknowledging the eroticism of Cleopatra’s body, Lucy ponders how much food it takes to feed her; instead of recognizing the reclining pose of the female nude, she demands if the model has a weak spine” (7). Lucy refuses to see the picture for what it really was meant to be; a pleasing sight for the masculine gaze. When Lucy finally asks her friend, Dr. John², what he really thinks of Vashti’s performance, his answer is a hard blow for Lucy, because “he judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgement” (Brontë 289). Dr. John, then, could not see past the fact that Vashti was a woman. To him that was all she was, and when he saw a woman on stage acting out of character, or acting not as a woman was meant to act in his opinion, this sight was not pleasing to him.

To contrast Brontë’s view, Surridge mentions Fanny Kemble’s autobiography *Records of a Girlhood* (1878). This text places a woman actress, Fanny, as spectator watching a woman actress as performer. Kemble constitutes the gaze of the audience as masculine (violent, even corrosive), whereas Brontë foregrounds the female spectator and privileges her gaze over that of a male spectator, Dr. John. Kemble takes pity on the actress on stage “when I saw the thousands of eyes of that crowded pitful of men”, and describes the actress as a “fragile, helpless, pretty young creature standing before them trembling with terror” (Kemble 465, cited by Surridge 10). This is far from the description of Vashti, who “looks with the eye of a rebel” (Brontë 287). Lucy witnesses an actress on stage who, when “Suffering had struck that stage empress; and she stood before her audience neither yielding to, nor enduring, nor in

² The character of Dr. John does in fact go under four different names, or aliases, in this novel. He is later revealed to be John Graham Bretton, whom Lucy knew from childhood, as well as the stranger that helps Lucy when she first arrives in the town of Villette. In addition, the character Ginevra Fanshawe gives her suitor the name Isidore to keep his identity hidden. We later learn that Isidore is in fact Dr. John. Lucy herself alternates between the names Dr. John and Graham, but to simplify matters I will only refer to this character as Dr. John.

finite measure, resenting it: she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance” (Brontë 286). Lucy describes the actress almost like an animal, or someone possessed with “evil forces” that tears her apart, yet they “still refused to be exorcised” (Brontë 286). In addition, Brontë differs from Kemble in her deployment of fire imagery associated with the gaze, in that she reverses the direction of the burning: instead of being consumed by the gaze of the audience, like Kemble’s actress on stage, Vashti threatens to consume the theatre with her fire, or as SurrIDGE points out, “Vashti seems to be consumed from within” (10). At the end of this scene an actual fire breaks out in the theater, as almost to confirm Vashti’s burning gaze. The topic of “the gaze” will be a central focus in my thesis and I will discuss it more in detail in the Chapter 2. Like SurrIDGE I acknowledge the subversive potential of “the gaze”, however, I believe that Brontë uses it in a slightly different way than many critics traditionally reads it.

According to SurrIDGE, what is significant about *Villette* is Brontë’s achievement in using the theatre to “disrupt the social restrictions governing Lucy, and to reveal rebellious, subversive, and unspeakable desires on the part of her heroine” (13). The theatricality that permeates the text, SurrIDGE writes, “suggested aspects of female identity which were largely unrepresentable by the Victorian novelist and unacceptable for the domestic middle-class woman”, and it “suggested a unique link between women and theatre” (13). Brontë uses theatrical metaphors to present to her audience a side of female identity which was largely unheard of in the 19th century, and this is what gives the novel its subversive potential.

Joseph Litvak has written extensively on the theatricality found in many Victorian novels. His essay “Charlotte Brontë and the Scene of Instruction: Authority and Subversion in *Villette*” (1988) is concerned with many of the same scenes already mentioned in SurrIDGE’s essay. The school *vaudeville*, Lucy’s cross-dressing and the Vashti episode are all referred to in Litvak’s essay. In addition, Litvak also draws a connection between acting and teaching, or governing. Like SurrIDGE and Beer, Litvak also acknowledges Brontë as an introspective

writer. However, Litvak demonstrates that private experience is actually an enactment of a *public* script that constructs normative gender identities. Like Surridge, Litvak draws a connection between Charlotte Brontë and the aforementioned Fanny Kemble, who also struggled “to cope with the theatricality of fame” (468). However, Litvak’s focus when comparing these two authors is not the act of gazing, but rather their common fear of public exposure and the ambiguous language that permeates both novels. It is precisely Brontë’s use of the language that Litvak thinks has subversive potential:

In *Villette*, as in Kemble’s *Records*, the theater and its metaphorical extension, theatricality, prove capable of arousing profoundly and intricately mixed feelings because of their own ideologically heterogeneous character, their availability to both authoritarian and subversive discourses (470).

Litvak calls the episode of the school *vaudeville* “the novel’s first major staging of its theatrical concerns” (478), and just like Surridge he sees the drama that unfolds on stage as an enactment of the drama that takes place in the girls’ school. According to Litvak, “the play dramatizes the libidinal intrigues taking place in the *pensionnat*” (478). I agree with both Surridge and Litvak in that this is “the novel’s first major staging of its theatrical concerns”, however, I believe Lucy’s role as an “actress” started long before this. The focus of Litvak’s essay is the role that Lucy plays as a governess and I will show that among many of the subversive acts that occur in the novel, the first major one is Lucy’s role in the classroom when she is challenged by Madame Beck to teach a class. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Litvak also mentions Lucy’s cross-dressing and performance in his essay, and he is also not satisfied with what other critics have said earlier about this. Earlier critics have noted the lesbian overtones of Lucy’s performance, however, Litvak feels that this is simplistic

arguing that “what is at stake here is not merely the reversal or reappointment of traditional gender roles”, but that the play has a peculiar structural function. According to Litvak:

Lucy “breaks character” so as to divide and multiply characters – both her own and others’ – and to produce an unmanageable proliferation of plots, whose point is its very excessiveness, its refusal to be straightened out into a single coherent narrative line (481).

In other words, Litvak views this episode as a narrative technique on Brontë’s part to illustrate Lucy’s complex nature. Here Litvak’s view differs from SurrIDGE’s, who *did* view the cross-dressing as “the reversal or reappointment of gender roles”. Litvak, as opposed to SurrIDGE is also not as optimistic about “the novel’s motif of female androgyny or transvestism”, and writes that it “appears not so much daringly iconoclastic as grimly expressive of the ambitious woman’s confinement to male impersonation”, and expands this by writing “At these moments, theatricality itself wears an aspect that alternates painfully between the liberation of role-playing and the conventionality that circumscribes and ironizes any such improvisatory freedom” (473).

According to Litvak, the ‘Vashti’ chapter in *Villette* is connected to the structure of the novel and Lucy’s narrative. When the older Lucy describes the fire, it

seems suddenly to be taking place not retrospectively, but at the same time as the event itself. And as the time of the narration collapses into the time of the narrative, the roles of author and narrator and actress “repeat” and “re-echo” one another in a potentially productive textual “chaos” (487).

The narrative structure of *Villette* is a very complex one, with two narratives merging into one; the embedded narrative of the younger Lucy and the frame narrative of the older Lucy, with the older Lucy moving back and forth between them. This can have consequences for

how the character Lucy and the novel as a whole are perceived. Furthermore, Lucy's theatrical and ambiguous language when describing certain characters and events, blur the line between reality, or truth, and illusion. The connection between performing and how this performance is perceived is something I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. In addition, I will discuss how Brontë uses double, or several, narrative perspectives as a narrative technique to illustrate Lucy's complex nature, as well as the fluidity of identity in general.

As we have seen, both Surridge and Litvak emphasize the introspective focus of *Villette*, and they both point to the subversive potential of the novel. They also acknowledge that this subversion is emphasized by the many theatrical scenes in the novel. In addition, Brontë's structure of the novel, her use of the language and her resistance to submit to the traditional marriage plot, as well as the ambiguous ending of the novel, can be read as subversive. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, I believe that all three kinds of acting must be seen in relation to each other in order to fully understand the novel. My thesis, then, will focus on both the on-stage and off-stage acting that is performed by the younger Lucy Snowe, in addition to the narrative performance we see in the writing of the older Lucy as narrator of the novel. Because Lucy's personality and identity is very much defined and characterized by other characters in the novel, some of their "performances" must necessarily also be analyzed. In addition to the typical theater scenes in the novel, like the school *vaudeville* or the performance by Vashti, I will also discuss how Charlotte Brontë uses double narrative perspective and focalization when describing characters and scenes, and I will argue that Brontë uses this doubleness as a subversive narrative technique to portray and critique gender roles, and identity, in 19th Century society. It almost goes without saying that a performance, whether on-stage, off-stage or even a narrative one, is not possible without an audience. Therefore, my focus in this thesis will be on the relationship between the actress and her audience. In Chapter 2 this means the relationship between the younger Lucy and the

other characters around her, and in Chapter 3 this means the relationship between the *narrator* Lucy and her reading audience.

In my thesis I will analyze the three scenes mentioned above by both Surridge and Litvak, in addition to five other scenes I feel are important to my discussion of gender performance and identity formation. Both Surridge and Litvak give us a valuable insight into the direction feminism was taking in Brontë's novel as well as the development of contemporary feminism. Even though they both wrote around the same time that Judith Butler began demanding feminists to begin using a new vocabulary to define the category of "women", their essays on theatrical performance and subversive gender acts in *Villette* does not seem to be affected by Butler's new theory of gender identity and gender performance, and Litvak only mentions Butler very briefly in a footnote in his book *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (1992).

In the mid-1980s Judith Butler began to argue that all gender identity is "performative"; an imitation of a code that refers to no natural substance. In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988), and later also in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler argues that *gender* is an apparent substance that is an effect of a prior act of imitation. *Gender*, in Butler's opinion, is a social construct, and we *act* our gender, both in actions and in speech. In her book, *Gender Trouble*, Butler begins her discussion of gender by criticizing earlier feminists' definition of "women". Butler argues that feminism made a mistake in trying to make "women" a group with common characteristics. She claims that this approach reinforces the binary view of gender relations because it allows for two distinct categories: men and women. Butler believes that feminists should not try to define "women" as collective group, but rather focus on defining "the subject", because, as she emphasizes: "The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms" (*Gender*

Trouble 2). For this reason, Chapter 3 of my thesis will focus on “the subject”, i.e. Lucy, and how it is constructed and performed. It was not until I read Judith Butler that I was able to see these much discussed episodes in *Villette* in a new light. When speaking of gender performance I have found that Judith Butler’s theory has been very useful for my discussion, and when applying her deconstructive theory on gender we can shed some new light on these episodes. I will use Butler’s theory for two purposes in this thesis: the first one will be when explaining and analyzing gender performance in Chapter 2, and secondly when explaining identity formation and how Brontë constructs her heroine Lucy Snowe as an ambiguous self in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 1 of my thesis I will begin by explaining to the reader why I have chosen these specific eight scenes to analyze further. Secondly, I will give a more elaborate description of Judith Butler’s view on identity formation and her theory on performative gender acts. I will summarize the episodes in *Villette* that I will analyze more in depth in chapters 2 and 3 while I present SurrIDGE’s and Litvak’s arguments on the three scenes that they claim have subversive potential. I will define my use of the word *vaudeville* and explain why this definition is important for how the novel is read, as well as explaining my use of the word “subversive” that I use throughout the entire thesis. In addition, I will explain Litvak’s use of the word *theatricality* since I also use his definition of this word. I will arrange the episodes I analyze as they appear chronologically in the novel.

In Chapter 2 I will give a close textual reading of some of the episodes summarized in the first chapter, and I will analyze more in depth the On-stage and the Off-stage acting that occur in the embedded narrative of novel. I will discuss the acts that Litvak and SurrIDGE think show subversive potential and, with the help of Butler’s theory on gender performance, I will show how this subversiveness can be seen in a slightly different way. I will explain why I think the episodes show subversive potential as well as how they show the fluidity of gender

roles and identity. In this chapter I will include a discussion of “the gaze” as a subversive act, and show how both the “male gaze” as well as the “female gaze” can have subversive potential. Lastly, I will point out how Brontë uses the *Doppelgänger* as a narrative technique to show the subversiveness of her novel and the fluidity of gender roles, as well as the ambiguity of the subject. In this chapter Judith Butler’s theory on gender acts will be relevant for my discussion.

Chapter 3 will address the issue of identity formation in the novel, and I will use Judith Butler’s theory on “the formation of the subject” to show how Brontë constructs both characters and plot around a “doubleness” which is used as a subversive narrative technique to critique 19th Century thoughts on gender roles and female identity. I will discuss the fundamental dependency of the Other in order for “the subject” to exist. However, I will also point out that this dependency becomes problematic when trying to present a truthful representation of identity.

My thesis as a whole will argue that what gives *Villette* its subversive potential is the “doubleness” that Brontë uses when describing characters and scenes, as well as when she constructs her narrative. Both the On-stage and Off-stage acting that occur in Brontë’s novel, as well as her split narrative are included in this thesis because all three kinds of acting are each important for understanding how Brontë constructs and portrays a female identity that critiques and subverts 19th Century conventional ideas about women.

Chapter 1

In my introduction I mentioned very briefly in a footnote that Litvak uses the word *theatricality* as a trope. I will use the word *theatricality* in the same way that Litvak does, however, I would like to expand the definition of the word. When I speak about *theatricality* in Chapter 2: On-stage and Off-stage acting, I speak of Lucy Snowe's *physical* acts that can be interpreted as *subversive*. When I use the word in Chapter 3, I speak of how Lucy Snowe, the narrator, uses the *language* in a potentially *subversive* way. Because I will use this word the same way that Litvak does, I will dedicate a few paragraphs here to explain why I have chosen these specific eight scenes from *Villette*, and how they connect with this definition of this word. Despite the fact that this thesis looks at 'acting' and 'performance' in *Villette*, there are very few "typical theater scenes" in the novel. By 'theater' I mean a performance that takes place in a designated space, in an institution, or theater as an art form. When the word theater is expanded to *theatricality*, however, the novel is full of scenes of acting and performances. Another interesting thing to mention is that there are chapters dedicated to typical theater scenes, however, the real performance takes place *outside* of this theater setting, for example in the chapter called 'The Concert', where the "real performance" does not take place on stage, but off stage.

I have chosen three scenes that both Surridge and Litvak discuss in their essays, and then I have added five more. One key word that I have taken from both of these critics is the word *subversion*, and I use this word as the starting point of my discussion. To subvert means "to overthrow (something established or existing)", and when I use this word in my discussion of how Brontë's novel can be said to be subversive I mean that certain acts in the novel either "obliterate" the binary oppositions of gender, or shows a certain ambiguity towards typical gender norms in the 19th century. In Chapter 2 this means that I read some of Lucy Snowe's *physical* acts as subversive, and in Chapter 3 I look at how Lucy the narrator

uses the *language* in a potentially subversive way through double narration and character construction. Both Surridge and Litvak point out how the many theatrical scenes in *Villette* can be read as subversive, and I also acknowledge the subversive potential that Brontë's novel had in the 19th century, however, I believe Brontë's use of subversive 'scenes' and 'acts' in *Villette* is much more complicated. To fully explain and explore these scenes I also need to examine Judith Butler's theory of performativity and gender identity formation, and I will offer a description of her theory below. I have chosen these eight 'performance' scenes because I think they illustrate how gender performance and identity formation are connected, how gender acts can create a tension between the feminine and the masculine and how gender was perceived in general in the 19th Century.

1.1 Judith Butler and Identity formation - The shift from "the self" to "the subject"

The shift from the "self" to the "subject" is essential to poststructuralist theory. Deconstruction asked questions about binary oppositions and how such binary oppositions structure the way we perceive, think about, and act in our world. Psychoanalytic theories asked questions about the idea of a "self", about how identity is formed, and about the relationship between the conscious mind, the ego, and the unconscious. What has been central to these questions has been the understanding the binary opposition "self"/"other", how it's been constructed and maintained, and what happens when that particular binary is deconstructed. Psychoanalytic theory also began to open up questions about the role that sex and gender play in the construction of an identity, or 'I' identity (Klages 88). Judith Butler was inspired and influenced by all of these theories in addition to feminist theory, and especially French Feminism. To understand Judith Butler's theory on identity formation and gender identity one must first understand the basic thought behind all of these theories.

The importance of understanding Butler's view on the subject is important for how we understand Brontë's construction of Lucy Snowe as character and for how her identity is formed. Brontë portrays a character whose ambiguous behavior and language breaks down binary oppositions. What emerges in the end is a very complex character who shows precisely that "the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms" (*Gender Trouble* 2). The subject of identity formation will be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.2 Butler's theory on Gender Performance

Best known, perhaps, is Butler's concept of gender as a reiterated social performance rather than the expression of a prior reality. However, the concept of gender performance is also her most misinterpreted theory, so I will offer a more in-depth explanation of her theory here.

Butler questions the belief that certain gendered behaviors are natural, and her theory illustrates the ways that one's learned performance of gendered behavior (what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity) is an act of sorts, a *performance*, one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality. Butler questions the extent to which we can assume that a given individual can be said to constitute *him-* or *herself*, and writes that: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 34). In other words, there is no *pre-existing* gender identity. Gender identity is a result of the gender *acts* that we *perform*.

Butler wonders to what extent our acts are determined for us by our place within language and convention. She follows postmodernist and poststructuralist practice in using the term "subject" (rather than "individual" or "person") in order to underline the linguistic nature of our position within what Jacques Lacan termed the *symbolic order*, i.e. the system

of signs and conventions that determines our perception of what we see as reality. Unlike theatrical acting, Butler argues that we cannot even assume a stable subjectivity that goes about performing various gender roles; rather, it is the very act of performing gender that constitutes who we are. Identity itself, for Butler, is an illusion retroactively created by our performances.

I will use Butler's theory on gender performance when analyzing various gender acts in Chapter 2 of this thesis, and I will discuss what acts Butler would consider to be subversive. To Butler, it is not enough for a woman to simply "look/gaze back", and in this way subvert gender roles. For this reason, I will discuss "the gaze" as a subversive act more in detail in Chapter 2. Included in the discussion on subversive gender acts will be the cross-dressing that is referred to in both Surridge's and Litvak's essays. I will discuss the transvestism (the cross-dressing and Madame Beck's gaze) and the role-playing (the gender acts both on stage and off- stage) that occur in the novel more in detail in Chapter 2.

1.3 The Scenes:

1.3.1 Lucy's performance in the classroom

Chapter 8 volume 1 is called 'Madame Beck' and contains an important occurrence in Lucy's life. Litvak has mentioned Lucy's performance in the classroom as an example of Lucy's acting outside the stage, and I believe this scene is the first time that Lucy asserts her existence as a subject. Lucy's "performance" in the classroom begins when the English teacher Mr. Wilson does not show up in time to teach a class, and Lucy is asked, or rather challenged, by Madame Beck to teach the class. Lucy's first inclination is to refuse, as both she and Madame Beck know that she will be tested by the students in class, however, Madame Beck's "masculine gaze" seems to challenge Lucy to teach the class.

As Lucy enters the classroom she already has an audience with all eyes on her. However, Lucy knows that it is not the girls in the classroom, but rather Madame Beck, who is listening and peeping through a spy-hole, that she must impress and establish her authority to. Both Lucy and the girls know that Madame Beck will not hesitate to get rid of a weak and unpopular teacher, so when the girls see Lucy enter the classroom they see her as an easy match. However, when the girls tries to start a riot, Lucy walks up to one girl, Blanche, and she first reads her homework out loud to the rest of the class before she proceeds to rip the page in two. This has the desired effect, as Lucy now has managed to draw attention to herself and to check the noise. This is not enough, however, as one of the girls, Dolores, still has not calmed down. Lucy sees that the girl stands close to a door which leads to the closet where all the books are kept. Lucy measures the girl's stature and calculates her strength. She finds that the girl is both tall and wiry, however, she figures that she has the advantage of an unexpected attack. She slowly walks up to the door, finds that it is open, and suddenly pushes the girl into the closet and turns the key. As this girl was not particularly liked by her classmates, Lucy wins the other girls' approval and the remainder of the lesson passes in silence. Lucy won the approval of the girls in the class and she established her authority. However, her biggest accomplishment was probably that she won the approval of the spying Madame Beck.

In this scene we can very clearly see Lucy use Madame Beck's gaze to establish authority. Had Madame Beck not watched Lucy through the peephole, Lucy would not be able to do this. She might have gained control over her students in the classroom, but she would never rise to the status of teacher without the help of Madame Beck's gaze. I will discuss this scene more in detail in Chapter 2, under 'Woman as object of "the male gaze"'.

1.3.2 The school *vaudeville*

Chapter 14 in *Villette* is titled ‘The Fête’ and it occurs in the first volume of the novel. The chapter includes the scene that both SurrIDGE and Litvak refer to as ‘the school vaudeville’, or ‘the school play’, however, “*vaudeville*” and “a play” cannot be defined as the same thing. I have chosen to call this scene ‘The school *vaudeville*’, and therefore think that it is necessary to define the word *vaudeville* within specific historical and theater contexts. Both SurrIDGE and Litvak use this word when they talk about Lucy’s performance in this chapter, but whereas Litvak italicizes this word, SurrIDGE does not. My analysis of *Villette* is based on the Penguin Classics version of the text, which is based on the Clarendon edition of 1984, which again is based on the first edition of the text, published by Smith, Elder & Co. in 1853. This first edition of the text has many typographical mistakes and inconsistencies, including variations in spelling, hyphenation, accents and italics for foreign words. One inconsistency is the use of the word *vaudeville*. In some instances Brontë herself does italicize this word (page 152 and 153), however, on one instance she does not (page 147). On one instance, when M. Paul calls the play a *vaudeville de pensionnat*, the Penguin Classics version that I use offer the translation “Boarding-school play”, however, I feel that this translation is a bit simplified. I will assume that when Lucy, or Brontë, calls the school play “the vaudeville”, she is referring to “French vaudeville”, a very popular form of entertainment in the 19th Century, and not the American vaudeville that derived from it and that most people associate with burlesque pieces and variety shows. A quick search in the Oxford English dictionary tells us that vaudeville can either mean: 1. *A light popular song, commonly of a satirical or topical nature; spec. a song of this nature sung on the stage*, or 2. *A play or stage performance of a light and amusing character interspersed with songs; also without article, this species of play or comedy*. When looking up the word in a French dictionary one will simply find the word to mean “a light comedy”.

In her essay “A Genre for Early Mass Culture: French Vaudeville and the City, 1830-1848”, Jennifer L. Terni writes that “French vaudeville is better compared to the twentieth-century television situation comedy” (222). Terni also writes in a footnote that the genre’s beginning, ca 1400-1450, is attributed to Oliver Bassan, and that “during the seventeenth century “vaudeville” referred to drinking songs, written to well-known tunes”, and that “throughout the eighteenth century, vaudevilles were basically song cycles held together by minimal plots and remained essentially unchanged until the 1820s” (222, footnote 7). However, with Eugene Scribe’s reinvention of the genre, Terni writes, songs became less important and had to give way to plot, dialogue, and action. Terni writes that just like situation comedies, vaudevilles were formulaic and mass produced, and that their popularity depended in part on this formulaic predictability. Other similarities, Terni writes, were that “each play was infused with the same kinds of ingredients: stereotypes, situation-based plots, reversal of fortune, mistaken identities, and, of course, happy endings” (222). Terni’s essay connects vaudevilles to the growing consumer culture during this time, and to the bourgeoisie class in France and their emphasis on material goods. In her essay, Terni argues that vaudeville played two different but complementary roles in the culture of this time. Firstly, she argues that vaudevilles were an integral element in the rise of modern specular culture that began to take shape in Paris by the 1840s, and secondly, that vaudeville representations provided a vivid mirror of the social dynamics of consumption that began to show during this time (226). Terni also emphasizes how vaudeville must be understood not only as a theatrical genre, or even as a kind of theater, but also as “a heterogeneous site accommodating a multiplicity of functions” (226).

At this point Terni explains that birth and birthplace, which earlier used to be the primary signifiers of identity, lost their significance and that new forms of self-representation, such as various consumer practices, became important when signaling your identity to the

world around you: “Smoking, dancing at particular venues, and reading particular books and newspapers conveyed a host of social messages” (227). Likewise, vaudeville became a consumer product that conveyed a social message. Between the 1820s and the 1840s, both the media and transportation system grew much larger. Because vaudeville very often pictured everyday life in Paris, the press promoted and reviewed plays in their newspapers. The rapid growth in public transportation meant that consumer spaces became organized in proximate areas. Vaudeville was no longer just vaudeville. According to Terni: “Vaudeville was a commercial space, a leisure practice, a consumer practice as well as a media venue and theatrical genre rolled into one” (232). Terni also adds that: “Seeing vaudeville in the 1820s was simply to see a play. By the 1840s, however, to see vaudeville was to consume a media product that was itself enmeshed in a web of ancillary social-consumer transactions” (233).

Neither Surridge nor Litvak explains this definition of the word *vaudeville* and I think it is important to know what vaudevilles were connected with, because it might help us to better understand Lucy’s refusal to participate in one. It is also significant in understanding why M. Paul would turn to Lucy for help and ask her to participate in vaudeville. Perhaps Lucy refuses to participate in the *vaudeville* because she feels that it will compromise her integrity? Since going to see vaudeville was considered a signifier of identity, Lucy’s refusal to participate in one does not really come as a surprise, as it would be something that she would not wish to be associated with. Lucy’s abhorrence of the bourgeoisie class and their emphasis on material goods is stated several times throughout the novel, and especially in the beginning of chapter 14. This could be the reason why she would refuse to be connected with something like vaudeville, and for what it represented. I have chosen to italicize the word *vaudeville*, because I believe it brings out the meaning of this word better. When italicized, the word is distinguished from the other words, and I believe Brontë meant to emphasize this

word as a *foreign* word, as something not to be associated with, and to differentiate it from the English words that she uses.

The occasion for the *fête*, or festival/party, is Madame Beck's birthday, and in honor of her the students are putting on a school play directed by the professor of literature, M. Paul Emanuel. Lucy's part in the school *vaudeville* begins when the original actress, Louise Vanderkelkov, falls ill, and she is asked by M. Paul to replace her. Lucy, who wishes to remain an obscure character, immediately objects to this. In addition, she does not like the part M. Paul wants her to play, claiming: "It was a disagreeable part, – a man's – an empty-headed fop's. One could put into it neither heart nor soul. I hated it" (Brontë 148). However, M. Paul persists, insisting that "play you can; play you must" (Brontë 147), and tries to reason with Lucy, saying: "not a girl in this school would hear reason, and accept the task" (Brontë 147). Eventually Lucy is unable to refuse him, and she must prepare for the part. While reading for the part, Lucy has already made up her mind about the character that she is to play and she tries to "take revenge" on the "fop" by making him as disagreeable and fatuitous as she possibly can (Brontë 149).

Both SurrIDGE and Litvak point out that the school play must be read as an enactment of the real drama that takes place in the school, and I partly agree with this view. The "real drama" that both SurrIDGE and Litvak refer to here is the love triangle between the shallow and selfish character Ginevra Fanshawe and her two suitors, Colonel Alfred de Hamal and Dr. John. Ginevra is clearly only interested in de Hamal, a student at the boys school next to Madame Beck's boarding school for girls, however she frequently accepts jewelry and other trinkets from Dr. John, and in this way she gives him false hope for a marriage between them. Colonel de Hamal, with his sleek and polished Continental appearance and his higher status, is much more to Ginevra's liking than her more manly and "bourgeois" English suitor Dr.

John, however she keeps both suitors to make herself more desirable to the other suitor and to make herself feel better.

When Lucy overcomes her initial fear of acting and becomes calm enough on stage, she begins to notice the other actors on stage. Playing one of Ginevra's suitors she notices that Ginevra seems to favor Lucy, "the fop", over the other suitor. Knowing how Ginevra feels about Lucy in real life, it then becomes evident to Lucy that Ginevra is acting *at* someone, and Lucy follows Ginevra's eyes, her smile and her gesture into the audience, where she discovers Dr. John. Lucy, then, represents Ginevra's real life suitor Colonel Alfred de Hamal, and in this moment the reader realizes that the character Isidor, whom Ginevra mentioned earlier as one of her suitors in a previous chapter with the same name, is in fact Dr. John. Ginevra clearly favors Colonel de Hamal; however, despite several attempts of pushing Dr. John away she is unable to make him lose interest in her. Her solution then, is to act out her rejection of Dr. John on stage.

According to Surridge, the school *vaudeville* is connected to the overall plot of the novel, and more specifically, to the drama that takes place in the girls' school. Through the play, Lucy and Ginevra are allowed to explore their mutual attractions. Ginevra shows her desire to the "foppish" de Hamal, and Lucy shows her ambiguous feeling of both animosity and desire for Dr. John. Further, Surridge writes, "important truths are thereby revealed or predicted" (6), because, Lucy does in fact reject Dr. John, and Ginevra ends up with a fop. The most important thing that the play reveals, according to Surridge, is that the "drama enables Lucy and Ginevra to undo the romance conventions which burden them both" (6). However, most significantly, Surridge writes, is that "their playful subversion of the conventional romance plot anticipates the ending of the novel, where Brontë sets up and then swiftly upsets the pairing-off of her heroine" (6).

I agree with Surridge that it is possible to read the *vaudeville* as foreshadowing of later events in the novel. However, I am not sure if Surridge takes full account of Lucy's cross-dressing at this point. If Lucy represents Ginevra's real life suitor Colonel de Hamal, while at the same time representing herself, the character Lucy, who later "rejects" Dr. John, is there a suggestion that Lucy must be read as both male and female and playing both female and male roles in both play and novel? I will address this problem in Chapter 2 under 'subversive acting and cross-dressing'.

According to Litvak, Lucy's unusual role-playing does more than just portray a "character" with stereotypical "masculine strength" that reverses traditional gender roles. Instead he views Lucy's break of character into several roles as a narrative technique in order to produce several unconnected plotlines. Just like Surridge, then, Litvak connects this scene with the overall narrative structure of the novel.

Litvak claims that "the *vaudeville* itself effaces the division between audience and spectacle, compromising the neat hierarchy whereby *those who see* exercise epistemological and political mastery over *those who are seen*" (479, my emphasis). I can partly agree with Litvak's statement that in the *vaudeville* the separate roles of actor and audience are wiped out. Litvak claims that *those who see* have authority over *those who are seen*, and I am not sure if I agree with this view. Firstly, it is not clear to me who Litvak understands to be the viewer and who he understands to be the object that is gazed at. If Litvak had written that the roles between actor and audience are *reversed*, and not completely erased, or *effaced*, his argument would become clearer to me, as I would understand him to mean that the actors on stage, Lucy and Ginevra, have authority over the audience, i.e. Dr. John. However, I believe that both Lucy and Ginevra take advantage of precisely the fact that they are "objects being gazed at", something I believe that Lucy was already practicing with her performance in the classroom. I will discuss this more in detail in Chapter 2 under 'woman as object of "the male

gaze”’. Because both SurrIDGE’s and Litvak’s discussion of the school *vaudeville* scene and the cross-dressing scene overlap, my discussion on these two scenes will also be treated together.

1.3.3 The cross-dressing

The cross-dressing that both SurrIDGE and Litvak refer to in the novel occurs in connection with the school play, when Lucy is cast in the role of a man, “the fop”. M. Paul wants Lucy to dress for the part, but this does not suit Lucy, and she demands to dress herself. Lucy’s solution is to keep her own dress on, and instead put on men’s clothes, “a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletôt” (Brontë 154) on top of her own clothes, and arrange her hair in a different style.

SurrIDGE claims that “Lucy’s transvestite costume functions as a key symbol of this sexual and social “play” ’, i.e. the school *vaudeville*, that she claims “lifts social constraints, subverts gender identity, and disrupts conventional romance plotting” (6). However, SurrIDGE is ambivalent in her view on what Lucy’s cross-dressing signifies. She acknowledges that an actress in men’s garments could symbolize power and authority, however, after making her point about the normality of cross-dressing in 19th Century theater, and that a woman in men’s tights or trousers could easily be viewed as an erotic object, she concludes that Lucy’s refusal to wear men’s garments must be a result of her refusal to be objectified.

Litvak sees Lucy’s transvestism, as well as Madame Beck’s “masculine gaze”, as “grimly expressive of the ambitious woman’s confinement to male impersonation” (481). Litvak, then, does not feel that Brontë subverts gender roles with the motif of transvestism, but rather emphasizes binary gender roles and a patriarchal hierarchy.

In her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”, Judith Butler mentions cross-dressing in connection with gender acts. Butler points to the difference between theatre and real life, and how this difference can have consequences for how we perceive gender. If a woman wears men’s clothes on stage the clothes can be seen as a prop and we recognize the performance as only acting, and therefore, not real. Off-stage, if a woman wears men’s clothes, or a man wears women’s clothes, this blurs the distinction between appearance and reality, between truth and illusion. Because there are no theatrical conventions that govern the act, the act becomes reality, and this frightens some people because it challenges their notion of reality. Of course, Butler is not talking about 19th Century stage conventions here, and we have already seen in Surridge’s essay the normality of cross- dressing in 19th Century theater, however, Butler’s point about what is *perceived* as correct gender behavior is what is important for this discussion. Butler writes:

although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions (“Performative Acts” 527).

The point about what is perceived as correct gender behavior is perhaps most easily seen in the character of Dr. John, especially in his judgement of the actress Vashti, whom he judged as a woman, and not an artist. Vashti on stage is presented as a woman, but her actions are not that of a woman. This sight does not please Dr. John, and so he judges her as unfeminine. However, the best episode to illustrate Dr. John’s traditional view of women is in the chapter called ‘The Concert’, where he loses interest in Ginevra Fanshawe because he suspects that she might not be the “innocent angel” that he first believed her to be.

1.3.4 The ‘Cleopatra’ chapter

In this chapter Lucy is dropped off at an art gallery where she stops to look at a painting called the ‘Cleopatra’. While looking at the picture someone suddenly taps her on her shoulder. She turns around and discovers M. Paul’s frowning and shocked face. M. Paul angrily asks Lucy what she is doing looking at a painting like the ‘Cleopatra’, and he is even more shocked to find out that she is in the art gallery by herself. Finding the ‘Cleopatra’ not suited to be looked upon by a single woman like Lucy; he instead guides her to four other pictures that he deems more appropriate to look at.

SurrIDGE mentions the Cleopatra painting in her discussion on Vashti and female spectatorship. SurrIDGE claims that Lucy refuses to view the painting as the erotic object that it is clearly meant to be, but instead looks at it through her “female gaze”. As mentioned in my introduction, this is the chapter where the difference between the male gaze and the female gaze becomes evident, and it is also the chapter where Lucy, in addition to watching paintings herself, also paints two portraits for the reader of the two men in her life; Dr. John and M. Paul. Lucy describes the two men as complex, or divided, however, she claims that both portraits are real. By doing this she shows human nature as complex, divided and fragmented. Most importantly, though, is the reaction that both men have to this picture because this tells us more about who they are, than Lucy’s description of them. The ‘Cleopatra’ chapter will be discussed in Chapter 2 under ‘Woman as spectator: “the female gaze”’.

1.3.5 The ‘Concert’ chapter

After Lucy’s mental breakdown at the end of the first volume, she stays with Dr. John and his mother at their house called “La Terrasse”. While staying there, Lucy accompanies her hosts

to several cultural events, one of them being a concert where various professional artists and the best pupils from the Conservatoire will perform, and that will be followed by a lottery for the benefits of the poor. Although this chapter is seemingly about the concert, it has nothing to do with what happens on stage. Lucy writes: “On the concert I need not dwell; the reader would not care to have my impressions thereanent³: and, indeed, it would not be worth while to record them, as they were the impressions of an ignorance crasse⁴” (Brontë 240-241). The chapter is, however, all about seeing and being seen. In my opinion, this chapter is important because it is the chapter in which Dr. John loses interest in Ginevra. The significant part, though, is why he does so, and when Lucy discovers why, she sees him in a slightly different light.

SurrIDGE never mentions this chapter in her essay. However, Litvak calls it one of the major theatrical episodes in the novel. Litvak also focuses on what goes on off-stage, however his focus is mostly on Lucy’s gaze on the little “drama” that goes on between the King and the Queen. For if Lucy “makes a point out of ridiculing most of the performers and congratulating herself on being the only observant member of an audience composed of dim-witted Labassecouriens” (482), Litvak also writes that by identifying herself with the King, Lucy really reveals more about herself than intended.

I agree that Lucy reveals more about herself through other characters in the novel, than she does by describing herself to the reader, and many critics have found similarities between Lucy and Ginevra, or Lucy and Paulina. Most strikingly, we can also see similarities between Lucy and Madame Beck. The narrative structure of this novel is a very complex one, and a lot of that has to do with Brontë’s use of “the gaze”. Brontë constructs a heroine who looks back at other characters watching and evaluating her. In addition, through the eyes of the younger

³ *Oxford English Dictionary*: *Thereanent* (Orig. and chiefly Scottish and north): About, concerning, or in reference to that matter, business, etc.; relating thereto.

⁴ *Villette*, chapter xx, footnote 15: Gross ignorance

Lucy, the reader sees the other characters in the novel, however, by focusing on certain characters and their characteristics, and reading Lucy's reaction to these characters and events, the reader get to know Lucy Snowe. The fundamental dependency of the Other for the existence and the formation of the subject will be discussed in Chapter 3. When Lucy looks into the mirror with Ginevra Fanshawe, we see two characters watching themselves. However, if Ginevra can be read as Lucy's double, as some critics have, then we are actually only looking at two different versions of Lucy. I will discuss the *Doppelgänger* theme more in detail in Chapter 2.

1.3.6 The 'Vashti' chapter

The 'Vashti' chapter contains three major occurrences in Lucy's life. For once, it begins with Lucy explaining to the reader her letter correspondence with Dr. John, and how she writes two different answers to his letters. The topic of double narrative will be discussed more in detail in Chapter 3. Secondly, Lucy is brought to the theater by Dr. John to see a performance by the actress Vashti. This is not the actress's actual name, but when Lucy sees the actress she can't help but compare her to the beautiful queen Vashti. Vashti's performance is even more mesmerizing to Lucy, and she wishes to know what Dr. John thinks of the actress. His answer is a hard blow for Lucy, as "he judged her as a woman, not an artist" (Brontë 289). The third significant event that happens in this chapter is that the character of Polly, or Paulina Home, is reintroduced into the narrative again, as Lucy's "rival" for Dr. John's love.

Both Surridge and Litvak only focus on Vashti's performance in this chapter. Surridge connects Vashti's performance to a discussion on female spectatorship, and points out how Brontë foregrounds the female spectator and privileges Lucy's gaze over the male spectator,

Dr. John. In addition, Surridge claims, the actress Vashti acts out Lucy's subversive impulses (5). For this reason it is easy to look upon Vashti as Lucy's *Doppelgänger*. However,

whereas the actions of a *doppelgänger* typically run parallel to the primary narrative, theatrical episodes puncture the main text itself, disrupting established patterns of characterization and social interaction with radical shifts in behavior, discourse and milieu (Surridge 5).

According to Surridge, then, Vashti's performance must also be seen as connected to the overall structure of the novel and to Lucy's narrative. Litvak seems to support this view when he writes about Lucy's description of the fire that breaks out in the theater following Vashti's performance that "it seems suddenly to be taking place not retrospectively, but at the same time as the event itself" (487). The 'Vashti' chapter will be included in both my discussion of 'Woman as spectator: "the female gaze"' and 'The subversive *Doppelgänger*' in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I will discuss the beginning of the 'Vashti' chapter in my discussion on 'Double Narrative'.

1.3.7 The Hotel Crécy

Chapter 27 in the novel is titled 'The Hotel Crécy', and I feel that this chapter is central to the discussion of Lucy's identity formation. When Ginevra Fanshawe asks Lucy: "Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?" (Brontë 341), Ginevra asks a question the reader also would like an answer to. Lucy's answer, that she is many roles, shows her complex and fragmented nature and that she is not easily put into one simple category. It also shows, perhaps, that Lucy herself may not have a straight answer to this question. I will not address the entire chapter, only Ginevra and Lucy's conversation on the first few pages, because this will be central to my discussion in

Chapter 3 on the formation of the subject and Brontë's construction of double characters and plot.

1.3.8 The park scenes

What I have chosen to call 'The park scenes' consist of two chapters, titled 'Cloud' and 'Old and new Acquaintance' respectively. In the chapter called 'Cloud' Lucy suddenly finds out that it is decided that M. Paul will leave Europe for three years. Because Lucy and M. Paul have become close friends by now this new information upsets Lucy. Lucy waits for M. Paul to show up with an explanation of this decision, but Madame tries to keep them separated. On the night that M. Paul is to leave Europe, Madame Beck has Goton give Lucy a sedative to keep her calm and to keep her inside of the school. The opium, however, has the opposite effect on Lucy, and the excitement it produces enables her to slip out of a narrow gap in the fence that surrounds the garden of the boarding school. As Lucy walks towards the party in the park, a carriage which has both the Brettons (Dr. John and his mother) and the de Bassompierres (Paulina and her father) in it rattles past Lucy. Lucy follows the carriage to the park, but loses sight of it. She then follows some music to an open space where there is some entertainment. Here she discovers that the friends that she lost sight of are sitting nearby, but that they don't see her. By wearing a large hat and a shawl as a disguise, Lucy is able to watch Dr. John and Paulina interact with each other without them noticing her. When Dr. John almost sees Lucy she decides it is time to move on. She walks off to a different part of the park where she discovers Madame Beck and her eldest daughter Desiree, Père Silas, and Madame Walravens. Lucy does not want to risk being discovered, so she remains in the shadows.

In the chapter called 'Old and new Acquaintances' Lucy watches this group of people for a while. The rumor at school said that these were the people that had hatched the plan to get M. Paul to leave Europe for Guadalupe. When the name 'Justine Marie' turns up in their conversation, Lucy first believes it to be M. Paul's first love, who is now dead, and she wonders why they would expect a dead person to join their party. However, Justine Marie turns out to be M. Paul's ward and a relative of the Walravens and Madame Beck. She arrives together with M. Paul and her aunt and uncle. Lucy suddenly feels a pang of jealousy as she believes that when M. Paul returns from Guadalupe he will marry his ward, who is a wealthy heiress. Because M. Paul is still in Villette on the night of the party in the park, Lucy realizes that M. Paul has changed his travel plans and is leaving on a different ship in a few days. As the party comes to an end, Lucy realizes that she must return to the dormitory before she is caught and she leaves the park.

These two chapters will be discussed in Chapter 3 under 'Double Narrative'. In this section I will argue that the duality of Brontë's narrative is summed up in 'The park scenes' because these two chapters can be viewed as a miniature version of the entire novel.

Chapter 2: Subversive On-stage and Off-stage acting

19th century criticism of *Villette* shows that the novel received mixed reviews among its readers. William Thackeray, once a friend of Brontë and to whom she actually dedicated the second edition of *Jane Eyre* to, wrote in a letter to a female friend:

The poor little woman of genius! ... she wants some Tomkins or another to love her and be in love with ... here is ... a genius, a noble heart longing to mate itself and destined to wither away into old maidenhood with no chance to fulfil the burning desire (Brontë xxvi).

To another woman friend he called the novel 'rather vulgar' and wrote that "I don't make my *good* women ready to fall in love with two men at once" (Brontë xxvi). While many reviewers applauded parts of Brontë's writing, most of them disliked the book's focus, and most of the criticism, like Thackeray's, participated in a rhetoric which claimed that women wrote because they could not get a good husband, and that writing distracted them from their 'real' duties as good women. Brontë herself had once written to the poet Robert Southey asking his opinion of some verses that she had sent him. In his reply he wrote that "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life: & it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her *proper duties*, the less leisure will she have for it" (*Selected Letters* 10, footnote 2, my emphasis). Both Thackeray's and Southey's opinion reveals a very common view of women and their role in the 19th century, and no doubt Brontë's novel was disturbing to many because of her portrayal of a woman's emotional inner struggles and her ambivalent feelings towards two different men at the same time. The fact that a woman could possess the kind of feelings that Brontë portrays in *Villette* was almost unheard of at this time. *Villette*, then, must have been difficult for a 19th century reading audience, because it destroyed some popular ideas about a woman's inner thoughts and feelings, her ambitions and her real struggles in life.

The overall subversive potential of the novel is found in the many theatrical acts and performances that take place in the novel, and this chapter will discuss these acts and how, specifically, they can be said to be subversive. My discussion in this chapter will focus on the acting in the school *vaudeville* and the significance of Lucy's cross-dressing in connection with a discussion on "natural" gender identity. My main discussion, however, will focus on the subversive potential of "the gaze", and I will discuss both "woman as object of the gaze" and "woman as spectator", and I will argue how being in both the "object position" and the "subject position" can be a subversive act. This chapter will include the scenes: the school *vaudeville* and Lucy's cross-dressing, Lucy's performance in the classroom, the 'Vashti' chapter, the 'Cleopatra' chapter and the 'Concert' chapter.

2.1 Subversive acting and cross-dressing

As we saw in the previous chapter, both Surrige and Litvak consider Lucy's performance in the school *vaudeville* to be an example of a subversive act seen in Brontë's novel. However, according to Judith Butler:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony (*Gender Trouble* 189).

As we saw in Terni's article, *vaudeville* theater typically parodied real life, and I have already mentioned the common 19th century stage convention of cross-dressing, so to read about a woman putting on men's garments would not be very shocking to a 19th century audience. Both the acting and the cross-dressing, then, would become, as Butler puts it, "a domesticated and recirculated repetition". What is significant, however, is the layering of Lucy's dress. For

Lucy does not in fact alter anything about her original dress, but instead, she just adds a few things to signal her role as a man: “Retaining my woman’s garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed in addition, a little vest, a collar, a paletôt of small dimensions” (Brontë 154). In addition, she arranges her hair so that she will resemble a man. According to Butler, though, there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and Butler claims that drag can be used to emphasize both the denaturalization and the re-idealization of obviously exaggerated heterosexual gender norms (*Bodies That Matter* 85). Further, Butler writes that:

Drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality (*Bodies That Matter* 85).

What Butler means by this is that there is no “natural” gender identity, and that drag only emphasizes this. Because, if one claims that gender is like drag, that gender is something that you “put on”, there is an underlying suggestion that there is some kind of “imitation” at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binarisms, and that “drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealization” (*Bodies That Matter* 85). Lucy’s layering of male and female clothes is significant, because it rejects the notion of a “natural” gender identity, where one possesses either male or female traits.

Lucy’s role playing on stage seems to support this idea as well. If we forget for a moment what Lucy is wearing, she still ‘acts’ like a man, and Lucy also gets into character long before she enters the stage, like when she is practicing in the garret “Perfectly secure from human audience, I acted my part before the garret-vermin” (Brontë 149), as well as

when she tells St. Pierre that “if she were not a lady and *I a gentleman*, I should feel disposed to call her out” (Brontë 154, my emphasis).

It is perhaps important to mention at this point that Butler does not see ‘acting your gender’ as ‘a performance’. Because, even if Butler argues that genders are performative, it does not somehow mean that she suggests that one wakes up one morning, peruse one’s closet for the gender of choice, put on that gender for the day, and then restore the garment to its place at night. This would reject the very idea that gender is constructed because it would suggest a *choosing subject* at the center of everything, which is something that resembles a humanist view of gender and the formation of the subject, which Butler rejects (*Bodies That Matter* ix).

In what way can the school *vaudeville* be called subversive then? And does Lucy subvert anything by wearing both female and male attire on stage? As we saw earlier, Litvak’s opinion about the novel’s motif of female androgyny or transvestism was rather negative, as he felt that Brontë only emphasized binary gender roles and a patriarchal hierarchy by employing this motif (473). I believe, however, that this is not the case. Because of the layering of Lucy’s clothes, her cross-dressing, or perhaps more precisely her “double-dressing”, cannot be read as an example of “pure” transvestism. Surridge suggested that Lucy must be read as both male and female: playing both female and male roles in both play and the novel, but I don’t believe that the school *vaudeville* illustrates that Lucy is *both* male and female. Instead, I think it illustrates that “women” cannot be thought of as a fixed, or stable, category, and that gender itself is very complex and must be seen as more than the typical “male” and “female” binary opposition. I believe that Lucy instead “obliterates” typical gender roles with her “double-dressing”, or “breaks down” the binary oppositions of gender, and thus rejects the notion of a “natural” gender identity where one possess either male or female traits.

This “obliteration” is later emphasized in the ‘Vashti’ chapter, because when Lucy sees the actress, she “found upon her something *neither* of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil” (Brontë 286, my emphasis). It almost seems like Vashti does not control her own actions, but rather, her acting is controlled by a “power” outside of her. Going back to the school *vaudeville*, then, we also see this in Lucy’s own acting, where it seems like the character that Lucy plays takes on a life of its own when Lucy admits that: “I know not what possessed me either” (Brontë 155), suggesting that Lucy’s acting is steered by some “outside power” beyond her control.

Lucy’s insistence on dressing herself, however, reveals to us that she is very much aware of how she appears, and this is also emphasized several times throughout the novel. Despite Lucy’s claim that only vain people is concerned with how they look, Lucy herself is also very conscious of how she dresses, or of how she feels that it is appropriate for a mere “looker-on” to dress, spending a lot of time finding the right material and color for her dress: “I had sought a dozen shops till I lit upon a crape-like material of purple-gray – the colour, in short, of dun-mist, lying on a moor in bloom” (Brontë 145). In other words, Lucy is very conscious of the fact that she has other people’s eyes on her, and that she must dress in a certain way: “Feeling myself to be a mere shadowy spot on a field of light; the courage was not in me to put on a white dress: something thin I must wear” (Brontë 145). She is conscious of how she appears to other people, not only on stage, but also off-stage, and she chooses her “costumes” with care and in accordance to the roles that she plays. The focus on appearance and the awareness of being watched brings us now to a discussion of “the gaze”.

2.2 Woman as object of “the male gaze”

In her essay ““The Situation of the Looker-On”: Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*”, Beth Newman writes that:

when a woman looks back she asserts her “existence” as a subject, her place outside the position of object to which the male gaze relegates her and by which it defines her as “woman” (1032).

In Newman’s opinion, then, a woman subverts gender binaries by “looking back” at the spectator. However, I believe that Lucy (and also the character of Ginevra Fanshawe) “asserts her existence” *not* by looking back, but instead by *being looked at*. In other words, she takes advantage of the fact that she is “the object” and she uses it to assert her existence and to form her own identity, and then to establish authority. In order to establish authority she must first assert her existence, and to do this she must first be *seen*. In other words, she needs the eyes, or the gaze, of other people to help her assert her existence and establish her authority. That Lucy needs to be seen by others in order to assert her existence becomes evident in the chapter called ‘The Hotel Crécy’, and I will come back to this in chapter 3, where I will argue that there needs to be a “you” that addresses the “I” in order for the subject to exist.

When speaking of “the male gaze”⁵, it is easy to assume that the spectator must be male, however, “The gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and to activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the “masculine” position” (E. Ann Kaplan, cited by Newman 1029). There are many episodes in the novel where a woman is put in a “masculine position”, and the most obvious one is Madame Beck

⁵ *The male gaze* is a concept coined by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey and developed in her 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. The male gaze refers to the way visual arts are structured around a masculine viewer. It describes the tendency in visual culture to depict the world and women from a masculine point of view and in terms of men’s attitudes (*Visual and Other Pleasures*). Madame Beck clearly does not “eroticize”, or desire, Lucy. However, her gaze is a matter of power. The fact that Madame Beck is portrayed as the owner of the gaze makes her the “active” one, something that, according to Mulvey, puts her in the masculine position.

and her surveillance. When Lucy is asked, or rather told, by Madame Beck to fill in for the English teacher, Mr. Wilson, who fails to show up for class one day, Lucy comments on Madame Beck's appearance, saying that "looking up at madame, I saw in her countenance a something that made me think twice ere I decided. At that instant, she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's" (Brontë 85-86). When Lucy enters the classroom she "beheld opposite to me a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather" (Brontë 87). Lucy has the eyes of the students on her from the very moment that she walks into the classroom and, as I wrote in chapter 1, she uses this to establish her authority. However, it is Madame Beck's surveillance through the peep-hole that really helps Lucy to establish her authority. Lucy has previously been aware that she is being watched, however, this is the first time that Lucy really uses the gaze to her advantage and to empower herself. Because of her success in the classroom, Lucy is cast in the "masculine" role as English teacher, and thus leaves her "feminine" role as nursery-governess. This episode is important in Lucy's life because it leads to her being cast in a role typically assigned to a man.

The school *vaudeville* casts Lucy in the role of a man for the second time, even if it is only temporary. This is the second time that Lucy asserts her existence and empowers herself with the help of her spectator's gaze. Litvak claims that "the *vaudeville* itself effaces the division between audience and spectacle, compromising the neat hierarchy whereby *those who see* exercise epistemological and political mastery over *those who are seen*" (Litvak 479, my emphasis). However, as I mentioned in chapter 1, the use of the word *efface* in Litvak's quote complicates things. Litvak claims that *those who see* have authority over *those who are seen*, however, it is not clear to me who Litvak understands to be the viewer and who he understands to be the object of the gaze. If I interpret Litvak's quote correctly, I believe he means that the roles are *reversed*, and not *effaced*, and that the actors on stage, Lucy and Ginevra, have authority over the audience, i.e. Dr. John. If this reading of Litvak's quote is

correct, then I would have to disagree with him, because I believe that what empowers the “objects on stage”, i.e. Lucy and Ginevra, is precisely the fact that they are “gazed at”, and not that they “gaze back”.

This is most clearly seen with the character Ginevra, who uses her spectator’s gaze to keep both of her suitors, Dr. John and Alfred de Hamal, interested in her. When Ginevra favors “Lucy the fop” on stage, her acting is not really used to make Dr. John jealous or interested in her, but to keep her other suitor, Alfred de Hamal, interested in her. According to Jennifer L. Terni, *desire* was one of the major themes in vaudeville, and Terni shows that desire and identity folds back into each other, in that “what to want is at least partially dictated by who one wishes to be, and vice versa” (“A Genre for Early Mass Culture: French Vaudeville and the City, 1830-1848” 243). Terni writes further:

Because vaudeville’s special province was the public face of the social world, identity was often portrayed in terms of self-regarding performances, that is to say, performances in which the self was almost invariably constructed in terms of the (imaginary) gaze of the other. Vaudeville implicitly recognized that desire itself was also animated by the same logic: that *we are inclined to desire what has already been recognized as being desirable by others* (243, my emphasis).

As we see in the school *vaudeville* Ginevra already knows this, and she uses this “gaze of the other” to her advantage. Terni states that “The configuration of desire through the other is structurally embodied in vaudeville in the figure of the rival” (243). Ginevra knows that to keep the one man that she desires, Alfred de Hamal, she must show herself to be “a desirable object” to other men, and for this reason she needs Dr. John to see her and to find her desirable. Being subjected to “the male gaze” and reduced to “an object” does in fact

empower Ginevra. By keeping both men interested in her she is sure to end up with the one she wants.

2.3 Woman as spectator: “the female gaze”

The two chapters that most clearly give examples of what one might call a “female gaze” are the chapters called ‘Vashti’ and ‘The Cleopatra’. In both of these chapters Lucy is cast as spectator, and both chapters show a “female gaze” that without doubt must have had a subversive impact on an 19th century audience. I will start with the ‘Cleopatra’ chapter before I move on to the ‘Vashti’ chapter and eventually connect the character of Vashti as a potential doppelgänger to Lucy.

2.3.1 The ‘Cleopatra’ chapter

Firstly, it is not just *how* Lucy looks at the picture of Cleopatra that is subversive about this chapter. Just the fact that Lucy is looking at the picture *at all* is an act of subversion. In her essay “Visual Culture and Scopic Custom in “Jane Eyre” and “Villette” ”, Jane Kromm argues that art making and art viewing were activities steeped in assumptions about gender, and that Charlotte Brontë developed these fine art devices in her novels “as part of a carefully crafted feminist critique of spectatorship and representation” (369). According to Kromm, when a young girl or woman was looking at art it was seen as a transgressive act; an act so severe that, according to 19th century scopic custom, it threatened the social order. For this reason this activity needed to be brought under control (372). Looking at art was not just a harmless leisure activity, then, and according to Kromm, for the male characters that we see in these novels it was regarded as an act of provocation, and they do their best to lay down restrictive or subordinating conditions of access (371). In the ‘Cleopatra’ chapter we see this

in the character of M. Paul, who is shocked to find Lucy alone in the gallery, and tries to steer her away from the Cleopatra picture (which Lucy in fact already has moved on from when she sits in front of it looking at some pictures that hangs *under* the Cleopatra picture) and towards some other pictures that he finds more suitable for a young woman to look at. The pictures that M. Paul finds more suitable for Lucy to look at are part of a series called ‘La vie d’une femme’ (Translated: ‘The Life of a Woman’). The series consists of four pictures that show different women in different stages of their life: “Young girl”, “wife”, “young mother” and “widow”. However, Lucy is not at all impressed by the style that the pictures are painted in, and calls it: “flat, dead, pale, and formal” (Brontë 225), and she finds the pictures “as bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers” (Brontë 226). Not only does Lucy look at art, but she also has an *opinion* of it. But even more significantly, she *expresses* her opinion of it, and no doubt her strong dislike of pictures that were deemed proper to look at for young women must have been surprising and unexpected to an 19th century audience.

SurrIDGE claims that in ‘the Cleopatra’ chapter “Lucy moves from constructing her gaze as male [...] to formulating a *female way of looking* (SurrIDGE 7, my emphasis). What SurrIDGE understands to be the male gaze is a gaze that eroticizes the object it looks at, and I believe SurrIDGE means that what is subversive about the gaze in this chapter is that Lucy refuses to participate in the typical male tradition of eroticizing the object on display, and that instead of seeing the picture of the woman as an object of desire; a pleasing sight for the masculine gaze, which is was clearly meant to be, Lucy reduces the Cleopatra from the “queen” she appears in the picture, and compares her to any other woman. Instead of focusing on the voluptuousness of Cleopatra’s body, Lucy instead ponders how much food it takes to feed Cleopatra; instead of recognizing Cleopatra’s reclining pose for what it was supposed to be, Lucy wonders why a woman who appears to be in healthy shape should lounge away the day on a sofa (SurrIDGE 7).

When Surridge describes Lucy's gaze at the Cleopatra as *a female way of looking*, I believe she means a *different* way of looking at the picture. However, Lucy's gaze and her description of the picture still lingers on Cleopatra's body, and she compares the model to an everyday women, calling Cleopatra lazy and expressing dislike over the fact that Cleopatra obviously does not mind her chores the way she should, and that the model is not dressed properly. Dr. John also compares Cleopatra to other women when he says that both his mother and Ginevra are better looking women. Dr. John's focus is only on Cleopatra's exterior, and he does not find the model attractive. It is only M. Paul, however, who sees the picture as art, and not a representation of a real woman. When Lucy asks him what he thinks of the picture, his response is that it is "*a figure of an empress, the form of Juno*" (Brontë 228, translated from French in footnote 21), emphasizing that the picture is not of a real woman. He also adds that the Cleopatra is not a woman that he would not want as a wife, a daughter, or a sister; however, he says nothing about the model's looks. I believe that Lucy *does* show a female way of looking in this novel, but that this is not evident until she goes to the theater to see the actress Vashti.

Lucy states that what she admires in art are "fragments of truth" (Brontë 223). She admits that she appreciates art that communicates to the viewer insights about the subject that it portrays:

These are not a whit like nature. Nature's daylight never had that colour; never was made so turbid, either by storm or cloud, as it is laid out here, under a sky of indigo: and that indigo is not ether; and those dark weeds plastered upon it are not trees (Brontë 222).

Lucy continues to criticize the “truthfulness” of the pictures that surround her, and her attitude towards the pictures makes it clear that an art gallery will not necessarily make sure that a work of art possesses elements of truth (Kromm 385).

2.3.2 The ‘Vashti’ chapter

According to Lucy herself, Vashti’s performance contains these “elements of truth” that Lucy admires in art:

Where was the artist of the Cleopatra? Let him come and sit down and study this different vision. Let him seek here the mighty brawn, the muscle, the abounding blood, the full-fed flesh he worshipped: let all materialists draw nigh and look on (Brontë 286-287).

In this quote Lucy also focuses on Vashti’s body, but she does not “beautify” Vashti, or makes her into a beautiful spectacle, or object, to watch as the artist of the Cleopatra did. From the way that Lucy describes the actress, Vashti seems to represent *feelings*, or some other quality that can be found on the *inside*, and not just a body, or some *external* feature:

I have said that she does not *resent* her grief. No; the weakness of that word would make it a lie. *To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied*: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds. Scarcely a substance herself, she grapples to conflict with abstractions (Brontë 287, the last emphasis is mine).

Vashti *embodies* grief and pain, and instead of keeping these feelings inside of her, she wears them on the outside for everyone to see. And it is not a pretty sight:

Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side, captives peerlessly fair, and docile as fair (Brontë 287).

When Lucy writes that Vashti has *conquered* Beauty and *overcome* Grace, there is a suggestion that Lucy sees these external features as enemies that one must conquer in order to see the truthfulness in art, even though the sight is horrific. And it is this horrific sight that Dr. John reacts to when he views the actress on stage. His reaction to Vashti's acting shows his traditional view of gender. When Lucy asks him what he thinks of the actress, "he judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgement" (Brontë 289). Vashti looked like a woman to Dr. John, however, she *failed* to 'act her gender' properly, and thus was not pleasing to the male gaze (i.e. Dr. John's gaze).

The 'Vashti' chapter is also an interesting chapter because it gives example of a woman, the actress Vashti, in both the object and the subject position of the gaze, as well as it places Lucy in the role of spectator, and thus they both inhabit the typical masculine position of spectator. But what exactly makes the 'Vashti' chapter subversive? According to Surridge, Vashti acts out Lucy's "subversive impulses" (Surridge 5). In this claim there is a suggestion that Vashti must be read as Lucy's double, and Surridge is not the first one to point this out. If the actress Vashti can be read as Lucy's doppelgänger, then, Vashti's performance must also be seen as one of the acts that makes the novel as a whole subversive. But, if Vashti is Lucy's doppelgänger, is Lucy then watching herself on stage? If so, then Lucy must be said to inhabit both the *object* and the *subject* position, something that emphasizes the ambiguity, or perhaps fluidity, of gender roles in this novel, which, I believe, underscores yet again how there is no such thing as a "natural" gender identity.

2.4 The subversive *Doppelgänger*

Claire Rosenfield writes in her article “The Shadow Within: The Conscious and Unconscious Use of the Double” that:

the novelist who consciously or unconsciously exploits psychological Doubles may either juxtapose or duplicate two characters; the one representing the socially acceptable or conventional personality, the other externalizing the free, uninhibited, often criminal self (328).

Charlotte Brontë was obviously aware of the Double and how it could be used to show the divided nature in humans, and she consciously made use of a doppelgänger in *Jane Eyre* in the figure of Bertha, who represents Jane’s other, darker side. What Jane *wants* to do; tearing up the bridal veil and postponing the bridal day, Bertha does *for* Jane. Bertha represents Jane’s anger, and she possesses the physique and strength that Jane wishes to possess herself. However, in *Villette* it is unclear if Brontë herself realized that she created *several* doubles for her heroine, Lucy. It is also unclear, I think, if Lucy herself should be seen as the socially acceptable one of her doubles. Lucy presents herself as a very cool and collected character to the other characters in the novel, yet to the reader it is obvious that she is much more passionate than she claims to be.

According to Rosenfield, the Double can present itself in two ways. The first one is, as we saw in the actress Vashti, a double that is different from the hero/heroine and that shows an often hidden, repressed side of the hero/heroine. Vashti seems to act out all of Lucy’s inner passion and feelings; she does not hide her feelings, but wears them on the outside.

Interestingly, the character of M. Paul is described almost like the actress Vashti; he is passionate, he does not repress his feelings, and he is also described by Lucy as a man who seems to be more comfortable in the presence of women, than in the presence of other men. In

addition, Lucy also compares M. Paul's gaze to Vashti's, saying that: "This very morning, in class, that gentleman had favoured me with a glance, which he seemed to have borrowed from Vashti, the actress [...]" (Brontë 327). The fact that M. Paul is described as a man who possesses "feminine" qualities makes him into an ambiguous character, just like Lucy, and he is used for the purpose of showing the complexity of gender that we see in this novel. Characters like Vashti and M. Paul, then, creates a tension between the feminine and the masculine as they both challenge traditional ideas about gender and gender roles.

The other kind of double, according to Rosenfield, is seen when the author presents two characters that complement each other both physically and psychologically and who together are projections of the crippled or struggling personality of a third character with whom the author is primarily concerned. This is perhaps best seen in the characters of Dr. John and Paulina, who complement each other and are described by Lucy as a perfect couple. As I have already mentioned, the character of Lucy is described just as much indirectly, through other characters and their actions, as directly, and in this case Dr. John and Paulina illustrate a sort of "lack", or "hollowness", in Lucy. They both possess a certain kind of love that Lucy realizes she will never have. According to Rosenfield, in both cases of doubling the contrary natures and descriptions of these complimentary Doubles are not what is important, but the way in which they reveal the loss of identity of the main character (328). I also believe that Lucy's doppelgängers can be said to represent different sides of Lucy's personality, but unlike Rosenfield I do not believe they reveal a *loss of identity*, but instead they individually, or in pairs as we saw with Dr. John and Paulina, make up different sides to Lucy's personality, or identity.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

By employing Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity I have argued in this chapter that Brontë obliterates typical gender roles, and that she "breaks down" the binary opposition of gender by creating a kind of "doubleness" in the school *vaudeville* scene as well as in Lucy's cross-dressing. Many critics have seen Lucy's cross-dressing as a subversive act. However, for these critics the subversiveness of the cross-dressing episode seems to lie in the clothes themselves, as they see the male garments that Lucy wears as a *symbol* of masculine power. This suggests that Lucy gains power by simply putting on male clothes, and I don't agree with this view at all. Other critics, like Surridge, acknowledge that the *layering* of Lucy's clothes is significant, and I have also emphasized the importance of this. These critics claim that this layering suggests that Lucy must be read as "double", as inhabiting both male and female traits, and that it is this doubleness in Lucy that makes the episode subversive. However, if this episode is subversive only because Lucy now inhabits both male and female qualities, then I don't see how this is different than claiming that it is the male clothes that empower Lucy, because this still implies that it is the "male side", the side that is now *added* to Lucy, which empowers her and holds the subversive potential. If the binary opposition of male/female is still upheld then both sides will continue to be compared to one another. And as a result of a comparison, one side will eventually come out as the "better" side, and nothing is really subverted. Instead, I have argued that Lucy's layering of male and female garments is significant because it portrays the complexity of gender and rejects the notion of a stable, or "natural", gender identity, and that this is what makes this episode subversive. Litvak claimed that the novel only emphasizes binary gender roles and a patriarchal hierarchy by employing the motif of transvestism. However, precisely because of the importance of the layering in Lucy's clothes, I have argued that Lucy's cross-dressing cannot be seen as an example of "pure" transvestism.

The main discussion in this chapter, however, looked at “the gaze” as a subversive act, and I argued that both the “male gaze” and the “female gaze” portrayed in this novel must be considered subversive acts. I mentioned how some earlier Brontë critics have argued that women are reduced to objects when subjected to the male gaze. SurrIDGE suggested that Lucy’s refusal to participate in the school *vaudeville* could be seen as Lucy’s refusal to be objectified. However, I have argued that in some cases this can actually empower the object (i.e. the woman). In addition, I have argued that both the male and the female gaze can be considered subversive in their own ways, and that Lucy subverts typical gender roles by simply looking at all and having an opinion about the object she looks at. I have argued that Lucy also subverts typical gender roles by keeping an introspective focus on the object she looks at, as opposed to the exterior focus of the male gaze. I began this chapter by looking at the “doubleness” that Lucy creates in her acting in the school *vaudeville* as well as in the cross-dressing scene. The last section of this chapter looked at how some characters in the novel can be read as Lucy’s doppelgängers, and I argued that by constantly evoking a certain *duality* throughout her novel, Brontë emphasizes the complexity of gender and the impossibility of a stable and fixed female identity.

In *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë presents a heroine with a very complex personality. This can be seen through the various performances by Lucy throughout the novel, as well as in all the characters that can be said to represent a side of Lucy that is not apparent to the other characters in the novel; like the passion of Vashti and M. Paul, or the “lack”, or hollowness, in Lucy that Paulina and Dr. John represent together. However, Lucy’s identity is not only represented through these various performances and *Doppelgängers* of the younger Lucy Snowe. The narrative of the older Lucy Snowe is carefully constructed to present another version of, or side to, Lucy that only the reader can see, and this will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Narrative Performance

When the character Ginevra Fanshawe asks Lucy: “Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?” (Brontë 341), she not only asks a question the reader has been asking throughout the entire novel, she also catches the very essence of *Villette*; the issue of identity, or identity formation. After Butler started arguing for a new kind of feminism in the mid-1980s, putting the focus on “the subject” and its identity when writing and describing women’s experience in general became widespread among feminists. *Villette* shows Brontë to be well over a decade ahead of her time with her introspective focus on one woman’s inner thoughts and feelings. Ginevra’s choice of words when asking her question to Lucy is also interesting, because she illustrates how a seemingly innocent question can reveal that even before asking such a question the one asking it might have already made up his/her mind about the identity of the subject they pose the question to. Ginevra gives Lucy a formal title, *miss*, before stating Lucy’s last name, Snowe. The title, *miss*, is only given to a young woman, and by using this title Ginevra emphasizes Lucy’s feminine side and puts her in the general category of “women”. However, throughout the entire novel Ginevra calls Lucy various names, some even refer to male characters, and perhaps this is a conscious decision on Brontë’s part to emphasize the difficulty of determining Lucy’s identity. For who is Lucy Snowe really? Lucy’s answer to Ginevra’s question, “Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don’t look the character” (341), shows that Lucy herself might not know the answer to this question. In addition, Lucy’s own choice of words when answering Ginevra is also interesting, as a “personage” can refer to either *a person of distinction or importance*, or just *any person*, as well as *a character in a play, story, etc.* So which one does Lucy mean? Her choice of the word “character” is especially interesting as well. Lucy writes that she does not look the *character*. She does not say that she does not look like *herself*. With this answer Lucy emphasizes the theatricality that

permeates the entire novel, and she introduces a theatrical language that blends theater with real life. Is to be “myself” to be “a character”? And is “my identity” just “an act”?

Lucy’s answer does not satisfy Ginevra, and it certainly does not satisfy the reader either. Ginevra continues her questioning of Lucy, asking: “But *are* you anybody?” (342) to which Lucy answers: “Yes, [...] I am a rising character: once an old lady’s companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school-teacher” (342). Lucy chooses very interesting words here: once, then, now. These are time markers, and these three parts can perhaps refer to either a play in three acts or the novel itself, which consists of three volumes. This conversation between Lucy and Ginevra takes place in the last chapter of the second volume. The reason for placing a conversation on identity at this particular place in the novel could perhaps be that Lucy is now finally ready to deal with the question of her own identity. Or perhaps she *has to* in order to move on, because there is a significant shift in focus between the second and the third volume in this novel when speaking of the two men in Lucy’s life. In the first two volumes of the novel, Lucy’s relationship with Dr. John is the main focus of her narrative. Even though we hear of the character of M. Paul from the very start of Lucy’s arrival in Villette, it is not until the third volume that Lucy and M. Paul’s relationship is dealt with and eventually develops into a relationship of mutual understanding. Perhaps Lucy has to really know herself before there can be a mutual understanding between her and M. Paul?

Lucy’s answer to Ginevra, though, supposedly reveals her true value; hard work. However, it is possible that this is perhaps only an ironic statement on Lucy’s part. On the surface, though, it would appear that Brontë wrote a novel about the “self-made woman”, and this would certainly fit into the 19th century ideal of the self-made man. According to Rick Rylance, the phrase ‘getting on’ became established usage in the 1840s, and it meant making a success of one’s life, building a career, finding a place in the mainstream of society, often from beginnings that were disadvantaged or isolated (“‘Getting on’: ideology, personality and

the Brontë characters” in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës* 148). *Villette* certainly depicts a woman’s journey through life “from rags to riches” and Lucy’s hard-working nature can be seen in the very last chapter with Lucy claiming: “I commenced my school; I worked – I worked hard” (Brontë 543), which shows that she finally achieved her goal of becoming a directress of her own school and that she worked very hard to maintain it. However, Lucy’s values do not reveal all that she is, and Ginevra pleads with Lucy to reveal who she really is by saying: “Do – *do* tell me who you are?” (Brontë 342). Of course, what Ginevra asks Lucy about is pedigree and social position, but her question echoes throughout the novel, as identity and identity formation is the central theme of the novel. Ginevra’s questions to Lucy may appear to be only general questions about identity, however, her questions are also of a very philosophical nature, and I will come back to this in a few pages.

Apart from a few people, most 19th century readers of *Villette* would not know the author of the novel to be female, simply because Charlotte Brontë wrote under the male pseudonym Currer Bell. The reason for this was simply because Brontë herself was very well aware of 19th century view of women and their role in society as we saw at the beginning of Chapter 2, and she was afraid that if she were to give away the fact that she was a woman, reviewers would not focus their criticism on the novel, but rather on the gender of the author. Brontë knew that female writers were viewed with prejudice, and she was afraid of being judged as a woman, and not an artist, as Dr. John judged the actress Vashti. Brontë herself chose to conceal her own identity from the general public, and by keeping her public life separate from her private life she created the same kind of “doubleness” in her own life as she depicts in *Villette*.

This chapter will discuss how Brontë constructs a heroine who through her narration subverts the typical male author’s narrative construction and plot, and shows an alternative to the male author’s often stereotypical character descriptions of gender. In chapter 2 I discussed

how the *Doppelgänger* was one of the narrative techniques used by Brontë that gave the novel its subversive potential. In this chapter I will discuss another kind of doubling found in the novel; Lucy's double narration. As I will show in this chapter, this other doubling is shown through the use of double narrative perspectives and focalization. In addition, doubling can also be found in descriptions of characters and scenes. This chapter will argue that Brontë shows the complexity of human character by constructing a duality in her narrative, as well as show how the fundamental dependency of the Other can present a problem when constructing a character, or an identity, because that identity will depend on how the Other views "the subject". This chapter will focus on the first few pages of the chapter 'The Hotel Crécý'(340-43), the last few pages of the 'Concert' chapter (249-52), the 'Vashti' chapter and 'The park scenes', which consists of the chapters 'Cloud' and 'Old and New Acquaintance'. Judith Butler's theory on identity formation will be useful for my discussion of how the character of Lucy is constructed, and for this reason I will start this chapter by describing how language can be thought of as performative, and how the subject is formed by language.

3.1 The Formation of the Subject

According to Butler, the subject comes into being by performing certain acts, and Butler's theory of performance also extends to certain speech-acts. If a subject only becomes a subject through acting out an "already written script", then it is the same with language: "There is no "I" who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse" (*Bodies That Matter* 171). Before the subject has come into being, there already exists a language available to that subject, and the subject, then, can only use this language that is available to it. Discourse precedes the subject and shapes it, and not the other way around. What Butler means by this is that the "I" (i.e. the subject) comes into being through being called, or named, already when the biological sex of the subject is determined; when the subject shifts

from an “it” to a “she” or a “he”. From this moment, the subject is “brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender”, and this naming of the subject does not end here, but from now on this first interpellation is “reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reenforce or contest this naturalized effect” (*Bodies That Matter* xvii). The subject, then, is already formed by a language that exists prior to it, and according to Butler, one can only say “I” to the extent that one has first been addressed.

In “Giving an Account of Oneself”, Butler develops a theory of the social construction of the subject, and claims that the very being of the self is dependent not only on the existence of the Other, but also on that Other’s *recognition* of the subject (22). Butler cites the Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero as an important source to this idea, as Cavarero states that the subject comes into being when the Other addresses it through the question “who are you?” (24). In other words, the “I” needs a “you” in order to exist. In addition, according to Cavarero, “if I have no “you” to address, then I have lost “myself””. Cavarero also claims that “one can only tell an autobiography, one can only reference an “I” in relation to a “you”: without the “you”, my own story becomes impossible” (24). Lucy, then, not only needs other people to *see* her, but she is also needs to be *addressed* by other people in order to exist. Ginevra’s question to Lucy, then, is essential for Lucy’s existence as a subject.

It is difficult to tell whether Brontë herself was aware of our fundamental dependency on the Other when she wrote *Villette*, but Lucy’s character is very often described either in opposition or in comparison to other characters in the novel. By using this theory of recognition, then, I have already established that Lucy needs to be addressed in order to exist, or for an identity to be formed within the subject. However, she also needs to address the Other herself in order to exist. Cavarero claims that one can only write an autobiography by referencing the Other, and throughout the novel, Lucy constantly addresses the reader as her

dependent Other. The duality that the “I” and the “you” creates brings me to the main discussion of this chapter; the doubling in Lucy’s narrative.

3.2 Double narrative

The trope of “doubleness” is found quite frequently in feminist critics’ commentaries upon women writers, and Robyn R. Warhol writes in her essay “Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*” that “To be “double” is to resist categorization as one thing or the other” (857). According to Warhol, the female author who makes use of some sort of “doubleness” in her narrative addresses binary oppositions without having to choose one side over the other (857). However, Warhol also acknowledges that feminism has no choice but to invoke this “doubleness” (858) in order to break down the binary opposition of the masculine versus the feminine. Warhol’s essay concerns Brontë’s use of the gothic metaphor of doubling, and Warhol argues that Brontë deliberately oscillates between two different genres, Realism and Gothic Romance, and that the genres do not create a tension between themselves, but instead they serve to double each other at crucial moments of both narratives.

The thing that gives the narration of *Villette* its subversive potential is precisely the fact that Brontë constructs both her novel and the characters in it around this “doubleness”. This is especially true when speaking of focalization and how it is used when constructing the character of Lucy. In the chapter called ‘Auld Lang Syne’, Lucy reveals to the reader that she recognized Dr. John much earlier in the novel, but did not want to tell him or the reader. She admits to keeping Dr. John in the dark, but she has also kept the reader in the dark. Lucy writes that she

liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through, while he stood before me under a ray of special illumination, which shone all partial over his head, trembled about his feet, and cast light no farther (Brontë 196).

As I have mentioned before, Lucy is often described through other characters, and in this passage, Lucy keeps the focus on Dr. John; she brings him out into the light, while she is left in the shadow. Lucy describes Dr. John, however, she is really describing herself, or her attitude, by focusing on him.

Describing the character of Lucy while focusing on other characters also occurs in ‘The Concert’ chapter, where Lucy reveals to the reader her changing opinion on Dr. John through a very complex gaze. In this chapter Lucy watches Dr. John watching Ginevra and de Hamal, who exchange a gaze with each other that suggests that there is more than just flirtation going on between them. Dr. John says to Lucy that he has

felt a new thing to-night, in looking at her [Ginevra] and De Hamal [...] I saw a look interchanged between them immediately after their entrance, which threw a most unwelcome light on my mind (Brontë 250).

Because of this gaze that Ginevra and de Hamal share with each other, Dr. John realizes that Ginevra is not the “innocent Angel” that he first thought her to be, and that she is “tainted”. Lucy tries to reassure Dr. John by calling it a “flirtation” and reminds him that this is something that he has been aware of for a long time, to which Dr. John’s response is that

what I refer to was not flirtation: it was a look marking *mutual and secret understanding* – it was *neither girlish nor innocent*. No woman, were she as beautiful as Aphrodite, who could *give or receive such a glance*, shall ever be sought in marriage by me (Brontë 250, my emphasis).

Throughout the whole episode Lucy keeps her focus on all the other characters. However, the reason for narrating this episode is to reveal two things: the first one is to show Dr. John's traditional view on women and gender, and the second one is to show why, because of his conventional views, Dr. John is not right for Lucy. Lucy has always wanted Dr. John to lose interest in Ginevra, but for other reasons. She wanted him to see that Ginevra is not good enough for him because she is vain and selfish. Lucy got her wish in that Dr. John does lose interest in Ginevra, but for a different reason. The reason disappoints Lucy as she realizes that Dr. John's reason for losing interest in Ginevra means that he is not right for her either, as she would have to suppress her passionate nature with him. Dr. John only sees what he chooses to see in other people and Lucy realizes that if she were to marry him her life would be very constricted, and that she would be put in the general category of "women".

Another example of Lucy's double narrative occurs at the beginning of the 'Vashti' chapter. After starting a letter correspondence with Dr. John, Lucy tells the reader that she answered Dr. John's letters by writing two letters in return, "one for my own relief, the other for Graham's perusal" (Brontë 282). This way she could tell Dr. John how she really felt about him without actually telling him, while at the same time present herself to Dr. John the way she wished to be seen, as a person of *Reason*. However, this is not how she presents herself to the reader, for as Patricia E. Johnson points out in her essay " "This Heretic Narrative": The Strategy of the Split Narrative in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*", Lucy is quite aware that both her emotional and impersonal letters are being presented to an audience, and that "this scene of writing is an emblem of Lucy's entire narrative" (617). Johnson points out how easy it is to choose one narrative over the other as the most genuine, or "truer" one, of the two narratives, but reminds the reader that one must give equal consideration to both narratives. Johnson writes that "The relationship between the two sides in Brontë's narratives and the critical tendency to privilege one side over the other are perennial interpretive

problems in Brontë criticism” (618), and points out how critics have a problem with Brontë’s dual presentation of characters and plot and because of this label her writing as inconsistent, even incoherent. However, Johnson claims that what critics have not understood is something that Brontë herself struggled to come to terms with, namely that the split is complicated by gender. For women it is not as simple as an either/or choice, and that “To choose one side immediately encases her heroine within a system, a cell, that subordinates her to patriarchal ends” (621). The duality of Lucy’s narrative, then, gives her a *choice*, and to have a choice means a certain *freedom*. However, the duality might present Lucy with a choice, but it does present a problem with interpretation, as some people will always choose one side to be “truer”, or more genuine than the other, as Johnson pointed out.

Perhaps the clearest example of Lucy’s double narrative can be seen in ‘The park scenes’, where Lucy’s complicated feeling for the two men in her life are summed up. The scenes consists of two chapters, and in the first one, titled ‘Cloud’, Lucy wraps up the love story of Dr. John and Paulina, as well as her own feelings for Dr. John. This is the last chapter where the characters of Dr. John and Paulina appear, and they are never mentioned again after this chapter. The purpose of this is perhaps to write Dr. John out of her narrative, and as a result, out of her life. This chapter, then, represents the past. The second chapter that makes up ‘The park scenes’ is titled ‘Old and New Acquaintance’, and in it Lucy professes her love for M. Paul to the reader. These two chapters that make up ‘The park scenes’ can almost be seen as a miniature version of the whole novel, because volume 1 and 2 focus on Dr. John, and volume 3 focuses on M. Paul. In many ways the duality of the entire novel is summed up in these two chapters.

The first quote used in this section as an example of double focalization also reveals Lucy’s view on construction in general. Whether it be how the younger Lucy presents herself to other characters in the novel by choosing how she wishes to be seen, or how the older Lucy

as narrator presents herself to the reader and builds up the novel, Lucy appears to be rather manipulative. She admits that she *liked* keeping Dr. John in the dark about her identity, and as a result she has also kept Dr. John's identity hidden from the reader. This lets the reader know that Lucy is perhaps not the most reliable narrator. Lucy quite frequently withholds information from the reader, and some critics claim that this is a matter of power. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz writes in her essay "Faithful Narrator" or "Partial Eulogist": First-Person Narration in Brontë's "Villette" that: "The technique of withholding evidence then gives Lucy power over characters and audience" (250). While power certainly could be a reason for withholding information, I believe instead that the reason for withholding this information is not a matter of power, but rather that Lucy is well aware of the fact that she has an audience. Lucy is constructing a narrative, and this means that she chooses *what* goes into this narrative and in *what order* the events are presented. While this certainly gives her power as a narrator, I believe, however, that it is a narrative technique to keep the reader interested and to keep reading the novel to the end.

3.3 Constructing a narrative (character, plot, ending)

Lucy is well aware of the fact that her narrative will be read by a reader, and the quote above could be interpreted as Lucy's rather relaxed attitude towards telling the truth. However, I don't believe this to be the case. It is in the chapter titled 'Dr. John', that Lucy realizes who Dr. John is but does not tell the reader. Lucy gazes at Dr. John, and he finds her look insulting because he misinterprets Lucy's reaction. Because of Lucy's sudden surprised reaction to figuring out who he really is, Dr. John believes that she does not like what she sees. Lucy claims that she "could have cleared myself on the spot, but would not" (Brontë 109), rather she states

There is a perverse mood of the mind which is rather soothed than irritated by misconception; and in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think, in being consummately ignored. What honest man on being casually taken for a housebreaker, does not feel rather tickled than vexed at the mistake?
(Brontë 109).

Lucy does not mind that Dr. John does not recognize her. She would rather be a stranger to him than having him recognize her as the Lucy from childhood. Lucy feels that sometimes it is better to “construct” an identity than to present reality, and the fact that Lucy is not recognized by Dr. John gives her freedom to form his opinion of her again, and perhaps see her in a different light. This shows that Lucy places emphasis on construction and imagination.

The duality in Brontë’s novel has presented critics with several problems concerning the interpretation of the novel. One of these problems concerns the manipulation that is used when constructing the character of Lucy and her narrative. The problem is determining whether this is Lucy’s manipulation or Brontë’s own manipulation. Critics have found it difficult to determine whose “voice” it is that speaks, and I also acknowledge this difficulty. The quote cited above could be Lucy speaking. However, it could also be Brontë herself using the problematic representation and misrepresentation of identity to explore the need of both the viewer, in this case, Dr. John, and the reader to change their identity and to have it changed in the view of the other; an action which stresses the imagination. Perhaps Brontë is trying to show that we can’t really know ourselves before we see ourselves in the eyes of the other, which emphasizes the dependency of the Other as previously mentioned.

This kind of imagination is also extended to the reader, who is quite frequently asked to imagine events, or fill in missing things in Lucy's narration. One example of this occurs at the beginning of the chapter 'Miss Marchmont' when Lucy writes

On quitting Bretton [...] It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! the amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass [...] A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest? (Brontë 39).

Here we see that Lucy leaves out eight years of her life, while inviting the reader to imagine how she passed the time. She suggests a story for the reader to imagine and asks why her life should be any different than others? Even at the end of Lucy's narrative she invites the reader to imagine what happened to M. Paul. Lucy describes a storm at sea, but she does not specifically write that M. Paul's disappears in this storm. Instead she says

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life (546).

Again Lucy invites the reader to imagine what really happened and how her narrative ends.

By constructing her narrative the way that she does, Lucy, or perhaps Brontë, builds dramatic tension and suspense on purpose in order to keep her audience continue reading.

3.4 Constructing identity (character construction)

Even though Lucy values imagination, it does not necessarily mean that she lies about everything and everyone. As we saw in chapter two, Lucy admires “the truth” in art, and this also extends to her own narrative. By showing the dual nature in her characters she also portrays the fluidity of identity. Some critics have interpreted Lucy’s tendency to withhold information as evidence of the unreliability of Lucy as narrator, and that Lucy deliberately tries to deceive the reader. I don’t believe this to be the case, though. Other critics read Lucy’s decision to withhold information to the reader as an act of power and for this reason, a subversive act. It is true that Lucy the narrator seems to be very aware that she is constructing a narrative, and that she is aware of what narrative techniques and language to use in order to persuade the reader one way or the other. However, I believe that by constructing her narrative the way that she does, especially by invoking the motif of doubling, Lucy is not trying to deceive the reader but merely trying to paint a fuller picture of the characters she presents to the reader.

At the beginning of the novel Lucy’s description of Graham is of a spoiled and perhaps a bit arrogant boy/young man. The character of Dr. John, however, is described in a much more favorable light. It becomes clear, then, that if the reader had known right from the start that Graham and Dr. John were in fact the same person, the description that had already been given of Graham would probably affect the reader’s opinion of Dr. John, and the reader would probably see the character of Dr. John in a much less favorable light. It was necessary for Lucy, then, to withhold this information from the reader so that the reader would see the character of Dr. John as a much more complex one. In addition, in the chapter called ‘The Cleopatra’, Lucy describes the two men in her life, Dr. John and M. Paul, as very divided. Lucy writes of Dr. John: “The reader is requested to note a seeming contradiction in the two views which have been given of Graham Bretton – the public and private – the out-door and

the in-door view. [...] Both portraits are correct” (Brontë 221). Later in the chapter she describes M. Paul’s feelings towards “the crétin”, Marie Broc, as divided. On the one hand M. Paul despises Marie Broc, but on the other hand he feels sorry for her, and this “resulted almost daily [in] drawn battles between impatience and disgust on the one hand, piety and a sense of justice on the other” (Brontë 227). Lucy describes M. Paul’s character as possessing both positive and negative traits, and for this reason she paints a complex picture of him. I believe, then, that Lucy is not trying to deceive the reader one way or the other, but rather that she is trying to show the divided and complex nature in both of these men, or in all humans in general. However, Judith Butler writes that the impossibility of ever fully inhabiting the social identity that one is named from birth shows the instability and incompleteness of subject-formation (*Bodies That Matter* 171). The facts that Lucy herself is described in binary terms throughout the entire novel could be interpreted as a sign that she lingers in a sort of “limbo”. Her social identity is not fulfilled and therefore the subject-formation is incomplete.

3.5 Perception

I have argued that there is a fundamental dependency of the Other for the subject to exist. However, the dependence of a “you” to see “me” in order for my identity to be formed within me becomes problematic when trying to present a truthful representation of identity. The reason for this is perception and individual interpretation. Lucy may be able to choose how she will present characters in a certain way, however, she cannot control how they will be *perceived* by those who view them. The clearest example of this can be seen if we go back to the example used at the very beginning of this chapter, with Ginevra’s persistent questioning of Lucy’s identity. When Lucy finally has had enough of Ginevra and asks to be left alone, Ginevra says that it is impossible to leave her alone because she is so peculiar and mysterious, to which Lucy’s response is: “The mystery and peculiarity being entirely the conception of

your own brain – maggots – neither more or less, be so good as to keep them out of my sight” (Brontë 342). Lucy tells Ginevra that her “maggots”, i.e. her whimsical or perverse fancies, are only in her brain, and that her impression of Lucy’s character and personality, or identity, is made up by herself. Lucy may seem like a peculiar and mysterious character to Ginevra, however, that is only her own interpretation of Lucy. Lucy can act a certain way, but she cannot choose how her character is perceived, or interpreted, by her “audience”. This also applies to the reading audience. Just like Lucy *chooses* how to present characters and events, the reader too can choose how these actions and characters will be interpreted. The duality in Lucy’s narrative might give her a choice, but as a result she also gives the reader the same option. In the end she is no longer in control of her own narrative, but instead the power lies with her audience.

So who is Lucy Snowe? The answer to this question seems to lay precisely in this Other that Butler suggests that we depend on for existence. Perhaps the question should not be directed towards Lucy herself, but rather towards the person asking the question? Rather, who are “you” to “me”? Ginevra tells Lucy that: “If you really are the nobody I once thought you, you must be a cool hand” (Brontë 341). From Lucy and Ginevra’s conversation we can see that their different values are revealed. Ginevra puts value on social status, while Lucy herself values good moral and hard work. However, moral value is just one aspect of Lucy’s personality, as she is more than that. It would seem that Lucy herself is aware of the problem of duality, or perhaps plurality, in the human character, as she writes: “What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed!” (Brontë 334), before she goes on to explain how the different people in her life view her, and how she possesses different qualities to them. Lucy, then, is not only the person that she presents herself to others, but also how she *appears* to others. Lucy continues, saying: “I smiled at them all. If any one knew me it was little Paulina Mary” (Brontë 334).

According to Lucy herself, then, Paulina holds the answer to who she is. Perhaps Paulina has the answer to Ginevra's question? A few chapters after Paulina is introduced into the narrative again, she learns that Lucy is a teacher at Madame Beck's boarding school

'Are you a teacher?' cried she. Then, having paused on the unpalatable idea, 'Well, I never knew *what* you were, nor even thought of asking: for me, you were always Lucy Snowe.' (Brontë 316, my emphasis).

When Lucy asks Paulina what she is now, her answer is: "Yourself, of course" (316). From this example we can see that Paulina does not emphasize *what* Lucy is; indicating her social status as a teacher, but rather *who* she is. And for Paulina, Lucy Snowe has always just been Lucy Snowe. Whoever Lucy Snowe is.

3.6 Chapter conclusion

In this last chapter of my thesis I have continued to explore this duality created by Brontë by focusing my discussion on the doubleness in Lucy's narration when constructing characters, plot and the ending of her novel. Because Judith Butler considers "the subject" to be the most important focus when describing female identity, I wanted to have a closer look at how the character of Lucy Snowe is constructed. By constructed I mean what elements, or personality traits, that make up her character and as a result, her identity. Because Lucy is the narrator of her own story, she can *choose* what elements of her character to present to the reader, and in this way she can construct her own identity, just like she constructs her own narrative. She can present herself to the reader however she likes, and in this way persuade the reader's opinion one way or the other. However, because Lucy reveals very little about her own character to the reader, I have argued that one gets to know the character of Lucy through her view on and reaction to other characters in the novel. This creates a fundamental dependency

of the Other, and I begin this chapter by arguing that Lucy's existence depends on the recognition of the Other, as well as Lucy's own recognition of a "you", in this case the reader. The Other, then, is part of what makes Lucy who she is.

I have argued in this chapter that Lucy's double narration is necessary for her narrative not to be put into a specific "female" category, and that this doubleness which is found in both the focalization as well as in the construction of characters, plot and ending is what gives the narration of *Villette* its subversive potential. The last section of this chapter addresses a problem with the fundamental dependency of the Other when it comes to interpreting the character of Lucy. Even though Lucy constructs her own character by choosing what qualities to present to her audience, she cannot control how her character is perceived by the Other. For this reason, Lucy is not only the character that she presents to others, but also the character that others perceive her to be, and this perception of her character can be different depending on *which* Other it is that views her. This chapter did not set out to answer the question of who Lucy Snowe is, but instead I aimed to show how Brontë presents a very complex view on female identity through a split narration and a fundamental dependency of the Other.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to analyze how Charlotte Brontë uses the many theatrical performances described in her novel *Villette* as narrative techniques to portray and explore the themes of identity and gender. In addition, I have argued that she uses these theatrical acts to critique a conventional view of women and gender roles in the 19th Century. Many Brontë critics point out this obvious reference to the theater found in *Villette*, and they claim that these theatrical acts served to *subvert*, or overthrow, general established ideas about female identity found in the 19th Century. By using theatrical performances and linking women to the stage, Brontë suggests aspects of female identity which were largely un-representable among Victorian novelists. I have used two such Brontë critics, Lisa Surrige and Joseph Litvak, who have written extensively on Victorian literature and novels, the Brontë sisters and theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English novel. Both Surrige and Litvak use the word *subversion* in connection with some much discussed theatrical scenes found in *Villette*, and the widespread use of this word among many Brontë critics caught my interest and formed the starting point of my discussion. My aim for this thesis, then, was to investigate whether or not some often discussed theatrical episodes, or scenes, in *Villette* can still be considered subversive acts, or if they must be viewed slightly different than what has previously been the case. To accomplish this I have used Judith Butler's theory on gender performance and identity formation to support my argument. Because Judith Butler puts emphasis on "the subject" when describing women's experience in general, I have dedicated the entire chapter 3 to explore how Brontë uses theatrical acts to portray aspects of female identity through the 'narrative performance' of her heroine Lucy Snowe.

I have argued in this thesis that what gives *Villette* its subversive potential is the "doubleness" that Brontë uses when describing characters and scenes, as well as when she constructs her narrative. The binary opposition of male/female present in this novel has been

pointed out before. However, as I aimed to show by using examples from SurrIDGE and Litvak, too much emphasis has been put on the “male” side of the binary opposition as the determining factor for the subversiveness of these often discusses scenes in *Villette*. As I aimed to show by using Butler’s theory, the binary opposition that is evident in the novel does not show that Lucy possesses *both* male and female trait, but instead it serves to obliterate the binary opposition all together by showing that there is no such thing as a natural, or “original”, gender identity.

I have also pointed out that one must put equal emphasis on the two gazes present in the novel, because both the male and the female gaze must be considered subversive. I have suggested a different way of interpreting the male gaze by pointing out that this gaze can actually empower the woman it looks at because she can use the male gaze to her advantage. The female gaze has been considered subversive by some critics because it represents a *different* way of looking. I have pointed out that Brontë subverted general ideas about women simply by having Lucy Snowe looking *at all*, as well as by showing that women can possess an *opinion* about the piece of art that she looks at. SurrIDGE suggested that the *female way of looking* can be seen in the ‘Cleopatra’ chapter, because Lucy does not eroticize Cleopatra’s body. However, as I pointed out, Lucy still focuses on Cleopatra’s body. I have suggested that the female gaze becomes clearer in the ‘Vashti’ chapter because Lucy emphasizes Vashti’s *feelings* instead of Vashti’s body.

I have shown that the *Doppelgänger* motif that Brontë employs in *Villette* helps underscore the complexity of gender identity because Brontë portrays male characters with female traits and female characters with male traits. By evoking this “doubleness” in her novel Brontë shows the complexity of gender and the impossibility of a stable and fixed female identity.

The “doubleness” found in this novel also extends to Lucy’s narrative, as doubling is found in both focalization and in the descriptions of characters and scenes. I have also shown how this doubling can be found in the Other, who is essential for the existence of the subject. However, this fundamental dependency of the Other presents a problem when trying to illustrate the subject’s identity because of the Other’s perception and individual interpretation of the subject.

My thesis as a whole has aimed to show that the “doubleness” that permeates *Villette* is what gives the novel its subversive potential. However, I have argued that this “doubleness” must not be interpreted as Brontë illustrating how women possess both masculine and feminine traits, because this only uphold the binary opposition of male/female. If this binary is not broken down, or eradicated, it is impossible to give a correct representation of female identity. Instead I believe that the binary opposition of male/female is evoked to illustrate the complexity of female identity, as well as the difficulty of presenting a consistent, coherent “subject” when constructing a narrative. My analysis has shown that many theatrical acts which previously have been interpreted as subversive only uphold this binary opposition of the male/female.

Theatricality, gender performance and doubling occur in many of Brontë’s novels. Future study on Brontë’s novels can benefit from reviewing some of the acts that has previously been considered subversive. Precisely what theatrical acts give *Jane Eyre* its subversive potential? How is gender and female identity performed in Brontë’s other novels? 2016 marks the bicentennial of Charlotte Brontë’s birth. I hope that my thesis has shown that even 163 years after the publication of *Villette*, it is still possible to interpret this novel in new and different ways. Just like Lucy Snowe depends on Ginevra’s recognition for existence, so Brontë’s novel depends on a reader in order for the words to live on. Because every reader’s

perception of the novel will be different, *Villette* will continue to be analyzed and interpreted in new and different ways, offering new and valuable insight into Charlotte Brontë's novel.

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