

Agency, Loneliness,
and the Female
Protagonist in the
Victorian Novel

Agency, Loneliness, and the Female Protagonist in the Victorian Novel

By

Marie Hendry

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Agency, Loneliness, and the Female Protagonist in the Victorian Novel

By Marie Hendry

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2019 by Marie Hendry

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-2779-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2779-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter One.....	1
Introduction	
Chapter Two.....	17
Fleeing Loneliness	
Chapter Three	39
The Lonely Protagonist	
Chapter Four.....	59
Loneliness as Prescription	
Chapter Five	77
Evolving Loneliness at the End of the Century	
Chapter Six	85
Loneliness and the New Woman	
Chapter Seven.....	97
Conclusion	
Bibliography.....	103
Index.....	109

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank in developing this project, and I appreciate the time and interest fellow scholars, colleagues, friends, and family members have given me along the way. In particular, I wish to thank: Jeff Darwin, Christine Devine, Dayana Stetco, Jennifer Geer, Barbara Cicardo, Michael Jacobs, Jessica Szempruch, Sheri Chejlyk, and Jim and Janet Buckley.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The image of Queen Victoria in eternal mourning is rooted in loneliness and despair after the death of Prince Albert and is prolific due to the connection between her motherly and spousal duties and her reign as monarch. Gail Turley Houston describes this paradox of ruler and domestic goddess as a “historical aberration” and claims that Victorians were “deeply conflicted about, antagonistic toward, yet on the whole profoundly loyal to the concept of a queen regent. Victorians viewed their female monarch as...acceptable, if sometimes disturbing.”¹ Victoria was an unsettling figure because, as Turley Houston contests, “she was a reigning queen in an age whose dominant ideology situated women as queens in the private sphere and warned them against participation in the public sphere.”² This dichotomy between ruler and ruled becomes one of the motivating issues under debate as women’s roles change throughout the nineteenth century.

The question of defining womanhood and femininity is part of the zeitgeist of the end of the nineteenth century in Britain. Victoria, herself, was instrumental in constructing this social dichotomy for women. It is her insistence on maintaining gender-specific roles and portraying herself as a dutiful queen mother that influences much debate on the changing roles of women, especially with the emergence of the New Woman toward the end of the century. Turley Houston, similar to many other critics, furthers this connection of the monarch’s image with femininity: “virtually always associated with her gender and its effects on her reign, her subjects, and the nation-state, Victoria—as many of her subjects asserted—‘womanized’ or ‘feminized’ the age.”³ It is this femininity, of being a woman tied to the throne, but also to her roles as wife and mother, and her image as an eternally mourning widow, that may inform the overwhelming sense of

¹ Houston, Gail Turley. *Royalties: The Queen and Victorian Writers*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

loneliness that is found in many novels of the late Victorian period. Her loneliness as a part of constructing her public image, and arguably her suffering from it, can be viewed as a prototype for mourning women in the literature.

The idea of loneliness, as a symbol of devoted femininity, may explain its use in novels of the nineteenth century; yet, lonely figures are hardly an unusual phenomenon in literature. There are many novels that touch on the theme of loneliness, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Victoria Cross's *Anna Lombard* (1901) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), but the novels I focus on in this work share a specific aspect of loneliness as an expression of the need for female agency. What emerges from the increasing debates of women's social hierarchy is a female heroine who suffers from loneliness because she cannot find common understanding, social mobility or love on equal terms to men. It is this desire to have autonomy that creates characters who suffer from a deep despair and have no hope of escaping because of their lack of social agency.

Many protagonists share this suffering from severe loneliness that creates a discussion of a desire for change in their status in society. This work, on how a specific loneliness trope informs readers about the issues facing women, concentrates on Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1892), Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), Wilkie Collins' *Heart and Science* (1883), Lucas Malet's *Mrs. Lorimer: A Sketch in Black and White* (1882), *The Gateless Barrier* (1900), and Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894). I will analyze how these authors portray female protagonists experiencing loneliness during the nineteenth century with a discussion of a specific need for change for women. To focus my analysis, I will explore the characterization of female protagonists and how the characters' different attitudes affect the ideas surrounding loneliness and how they display an acute awareness of their lack of agency. Finally, this exploration of lack of agency is communicated through a connection of loneliness and consequences for women forced into gender specific roles as important to understanding marriage reform in the *fin de siècle*.

Loneliness and Psychology

The complete psychological aspects of loneliness are not within the scope of this work and I am not arguing that loneliness in the nineteenth century novel only exists in this model. As stated earlier, I wish to explore

a specific use and expression of loneliness found in Victorian novels that feature a central female protagonist who is shown without choice, agency, voice, and with limited occupation. The following analysis will look at how loneliness is described as a part of the discussion of how women were affected by their prescribed roles in society. To aid in this discussion, I do find that some definitions from psychological studies will aid in my locating these specific elements of loneliness expression. For instance, John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick in their study, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, give a succinct definition of loneliness that will be used in this work:

In English, we have a word for pain and a word for thirst, but no single, specific terms that mean the opposite. We merely reference the absence of these aversive conditions, which makes sense, because their absence is not considered part of the normal state... ‘not lonely’—there is no better, more specific term for it—is also, like ‘not thirsty’ or ‘not in pain,’ very much part of the normal state. Health and well-being for a member of our species requires, among other things, being satisfied and secure in our bonds with other people, a condition of ‘not being lonely’ that, for want of a better word, we call social connection.⁴

As defined by Cacioppo and Patrick, loneliness is defined by a lack, and it is this lack that is prevalent to these character’s discussion of the social structures that define their lives. As there is no way to easily discuss a lack of agency without stating that there is something missing from the root agency, loneliness is an expression of missing components. The characters layer “lack,” of agency and loneliness, to develop a complex coded language of the need for change. Cacioppo and Patrick’s definition focuses how society defines loneliness as a negative “condition,” but more importantly as an expression for the need for social connection. Since I wish to show the prolific use of loneliness as a consequence of women’s lack of social agency, I will be surveying specific instances of loneliness defined from this viewpoint. In other words, I will be analyzing when female protagonists are shown being forced into circumstances of loneliness and having no social recourse to “not be lonely,” as Cacioppo and Patrick argue.

Somewhat different in its approach, *Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology and Literature*, by Ben Lazare Mijuskovic, uses post-modern philosophies to discuss what he believes to be the *a priori* discussion of

⁴ Cacioppo, John T. and William Patrick. *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*. New York: Norton, 2008, 8.

loneliness in these three fields.⁵ To prove his argument, he draws heavily on Husserl and Hegel, in particular their examination into phenomenology, to discuss how the human creature is in itself a lonely being. Discerning why people are lonely is important to Mijuskovic because “what does it matter...if we formulate a ‘philosophy of death’ if we [fail] antecedently to grasp the significance of individual human life, of the existential uniqueness of aloneness?”⁶ Mijuskovic discusses the need to study loneliness as a field, but more interestingly, he draws heavily on the Victorian period to prove his argument that people suffer from loneliness, in particular George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* (1861) and Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895). His work points to the discussion of loneliness as an important philosophical development that must be explored further.⁷ This work agrees with Mijuskovic’s idea that loneliness should be studied further. But unlike Mijuskovic, I am taking an *a posteriori* approach to why loneliness is a major part of each of the following female protagonists’ narratives. I wish to decipher the narrative function of loneliness in each of the following novels studied here to show that loneliness is used as an expression of the inequality of social roles. To aid in this discussion, a survey of some of the many critical approaches to loneliness develops an *a posteriori* approach to the expression of loneliness in the novels studied in this work.

Critical Approaches to Loneliness

Two other critical approaches to loneliness and literature address identity as part of their discussion of lack. The first, *Loneliness and Time: The Story of British Travel Writing* by Mark Cocker, argues that travel literature has been “looked over” for its significance to self-definition.⁸ He breaks travel literature into international sections, Greece and Tibet for example, and surveys the travel literature from each region in its entirety. Though he does not focus as much on loneliness directly in his analysis, he uses it as a motivating factor of travel narratives in general. He continues his argument for the use of loneliness in discerning Victorian thought

⁵ Mijuskovic, Ben Lazare. *Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature*. Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1979.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷ Interestingly enough, his conclusion apologizes for his work being depressing. This apology brings up an interesting dialogue behind loneliness as a study.

⁸ Cocker, Mark. *Loneliness and Time: The Story of British Travel Writing*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1992.

outside of the melodrama and moral compass of the novel. Most importantly to his study is how he places Victorian thought and history within the context of the self-banishment of travel. He offers an appraisal of Victorian thought and travel:

The key issue is that, in the interior landscape of the traveler, Britain seemed to represent, and to place on his or her experience, some kind of limitation. This [limitation] applies equally to their [the traveler's] interpretation of foreign places. Whatever it was which seemed more fully expressed in foreign society, is really only the detail. The central, unifying principle in travel books is that abroad is always a metaphysical blank sheet on which the traveler could write and rewrite the story, as he or she would wish it to be.⁹

He touches on a theme that applies directly to lack of agency and loneliness for how writers use loneliness as a tool to help reclaim female identity. Most of the protagonists in the following chapters are portrayed as separated from society, as Cocker discusses in his analysis of the English traveler abroad.¹⁰ What is unique about this form of loneliness is how each female protagonist is clear about her feelings and her lack of agency to change her situation that leads to these feelings of isolation. In the novels chosen for this study, Lucy Snowe, in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, sees others marry and form social connections. Her motives for not participating in these social traditions revolve around her own insecurities, but also in her lack of any relatives, money, or situation as she moves to Brussels. Hardy's Tess, when abandoned by her husband, is left with no recourse but to roam the countryside, alone. In fact, Tess is arguably alone during the entire novel because of men who can exhibit control over her life and use this control quite frequently. In the case of Hepworth Dixon's work, even with the choice of career, the main character chooses the male characters' desires over her own, making her career a derivative of that choice instead of one from agency. The landscape and travel, as Cocker argues, becomes the lens to focus the loneliness these characters express as they mitigate their own lack of social agency.

The second work that uses loneliness as a critical approach is John Sitter's *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England*.¹¹ He

⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sitter, John. *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.

discusses how loneliness continues to appear when describing the relationship between the reader and writer. The portrayal of loneliness as a force of change can be seen in Sitter's work as he uses the term "loneliness" to describe the literary shift in the eighteenth century from public to private, for both the writer and the reader:

the emergence and articulation of this [what Sitter refers to as a 'purity of words' between writer and reader] desire point to a broader sense of literary loneliness, that is, to the isolation of 'literature' itself as a category...in terms of the semantic change—in which the word 'literature' shifts in meaning from (roughly) everything written to 'imaginative' writing—and in terms of economic specialization of industrial capitalism.¹²

Sitter's analysis of literature's semiotics leads him to a discussion of literature as a lonely—both for the reader and the writer—vocation. Lucy, in *Villette*, uses this dichotomy as it navigates between narrator, character, and her direct addresses to the reader. Though Sitter does not use loneliness as directly as the approach of this work, his discussion is important in the development of loneliness as a larger part of literary expression.

Ruskin and Ellis: Views on Victorian Femininity and Education

When discussing social mobility, social expectations for women during the Victorian period informs how the characters express loneliness when confronted with these roles. Ruskin is often referred to as the voice of the Victorian era, and it can be argued that his lecture series *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) outlines women's roles from this voice. He begins the lecture "Of King's Treasures" with a discussion of education, and how many parents, "particularly mothers," ask about framing education from a proper "station in life."¹³ This beginning complies with many issues following in this work and the discussion of how these viewpoints—education, proper station, roles and how women enforce these roles—are expressed through loneliness.

The lecture, "Of Queen's Gardens," is integral in framing women as goddesses in the domestic sphere. His picture of the home is:

¹² Ibid., 218-219.

¹³ Ruskin, John. *Ruskin's Sesame and Lilies*. Ed. C. R. Rounds. New York: American Book Co., 1916, 34.

so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods, before whose faces none may come but those whom they can receive with love,—so far as it is this, and rood and fire are types only of a nobler shade and light,—shade as of the rock in a weary land, and light as of the Paros in the stormy sea;—so far it vindicates the name, and fulfills the praise, of Home. And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her.¹⁴

This idea can be used as the summary of the lecture, of which there is more discussion of gods, goddesses, home and women, and as a summary of a major issue in this work. The context of how women who do not have traditional homes, which many characters in this work do not have, and how society enforces the role of women in the home leads to ennui and loneliness. Many of the women in this work find this ideal unobtainable, often because of men, such as Mary in *The Story of a Modern Woman*, or because this viewpoint does not align with personal desires, as regards Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*.

In comparison to Ruskin's view, Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Women of England* (1839), argues that women are capable of the same roles and desires as men.¹⁵ Her argument of ladies versus women, that ladies are not of value in the home because they are taught to be obsessed with physical appearance, or the phrase used in parts of this work, "looking pretty," directly questions the image of domestic goddess. Ellis calls for a change in the way ladies are portrayed in the home to be on more of an equal footing, and she uses the term "woman" to reflect this change in attitude.

To continue this debate on the merits of women versus ladies in the home is a discussion of idleness, which is also an important part of how the characters in this work express and feel loneliness, something which is mirrored in Helen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*. Both suffer loneliness under the assumption that they are to do little but sew and to "look pretty." Ellis is against idleness when she argues that "this state of listless indifference, my sisters, must not be. You have deep responsibilities; you have urgent claims; a nation's moral wealth is in your keeping. [...] Let us consider what you are, and have been, and by what peculiarities of feeling and habit you have been able to throw so much additional weight into the scale of your country's worth."¹⁶ Ever the

¹⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵ Ellis, Sarah Stickney. *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits, Primary Source Edition*. 1843. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 2013.

¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

patriot, Ellis feels that society's moral compass begins in the home, and that women are integral to solid nationhood.

Her argument about nationhood extends to education, where she makes the bold claim that education should be extended to those who desire to excel at it. However, she undercuts this argument with an approach to empathy over education. She argues that she is:

decidedly of the opinion that no human being can know too much, so long as the sphere of knowledge does not extend to what is positively evil. I am also of the opinion that there is scarcely any department of art or science, still less of mental application, which is not calculated to strengthen and improve the mind; but at the same time I regard the improvement of the *heart* of so much greater consequence, that if time and opportunity should fail for both, I would strenuously recommend that women should be sent home from school with fewer accomplishments, and more of the will and the power to perform the various duties necessarily devolving upon them.¹⁷

This argument shows that female education reformers felt that education benefited everyone, but the debate over the role of women in the home could outweigh the best of intentions. It is this debate that is integral to this work, and in particular the analysis of *The Mill on the Floss*.

“On Female Education”

Similar in scope to Ellis is Harriet Martineau's views on women's education, which are influential to the debate about the purpose and function of women's education reform.¹⁸ Much has been said about women's education during and after the Victorian period. Though it is not within the scope of this work to discuss education completely, it is helpful to discuss some influences on Victorian modern thought about women's education because many of the characters analyzed in the following chapters see education as a means of escape from their position and loneliness. In particular Martineau's 1822 article in the *Monthly Repository*, “On Women's Education,” succinctly summarizes the call for more inclusion regarding women's education.¹⁹ As stated earlier, education reform is an important component of the novels presented in this work.

Though “On Women's Education” was written early in Martineau's life and published in a Unitarian magazine, its influence continues because of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

¹⁸ See Martineau, Harriet. “On Female Education.” *The Monthly Repository*, 1822.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

Martineau's work on reform for women. This article outlines the general goal of women's education reform. Under the rhetorical question of the purpose of education reform is the argument that others have made, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Ellis, and Mary in *The Story of a Modern Woman*.²⁰ They argue that better education would lead to a stronger household because educated women would better educate children and prove to be wiser companions. Aligning with this argument is Martineau's philosophical works on gender and women's roles. She focuses on understanding society, just as Eliot's Maggie desires to understand social roles. Martineau argues that analyzing society would lead to an understanding of why women were considered less than men during her time period.

The risks of women being uneducated is an important issue to the protagonists of this work. With the hope of better understanding society, Martineau debates the social norms regarding women's education in her article. Though there is discussion of the physical differences (which continues as a major aspect of the discussion of women's roles today), this quickly leads to a discussion of physical unimportance when considering children's education. She argues that differences in frame mean little when dealing with children, since they are often the same size, which leads to her argument that "we find that as long as the studies of children of both sexes continue the same, the progress they make is equal." This view was shared by many proponents of women's education reform during this time period and was part of the debate of *The Mill on the Floss*. Maggie is portrayed as intelligent and inquisitive in comparison to her robust brother, Tom, who struggles with higher education. Furthering this debate is Philip Wakem who is in love with Maggie and is also her brother Tom's schoolmate. He is of small stature, has a deformity, and is often portrayed as womanly and sensitive. However, Philip and Maggie often represent the more intelligent characters in the novel, at school, at home and in comparison, to more physically and socially powerful men, such as Tom.

With physicality aside, Martineau argues the purpose of women's education reform to not only help women in the home, but if they do not get married:

I only wish that their powers should be so employed that they should not be obliged to seek amusements beneath them, and injurious to them, I wish

²⁰ It is noted that many of these authors did not feel that they agreed with each other. Also, many of these authors would find issue with being paired with the controversial views and lifestyle of Wollstonecraft.

them to be companions to men, instead of playthings or servants, one of which an ignorant woman must commonly be. If they are called to be wives, a sensible mind is an essential qualification for the domestic character; if they remain single, liberal pursuits are absolutely necessary to preserve them from the faults so generally attributed to that state, and so justly and inevitably, while the mind is buried in darkness.²¹

Martineau argues that the dangers are greater for women who are uneducated than is the risk to the assumed stability of the home. Tess claims that higher-class women are afforded knowledge that will help them mitigate dangerous situations, and Mary in *The Story of a Modern Woman* debates with her early teachers about the inequalities of education. Maggie expresses a desire for knowledge, so she can understand why social stratification exists, as Lucy looks toward education to escape her ennui.

Education and its connection to social status is an important aspect of the discussion of loneliness for the protagonists in this work. These characters argue that education is a means to understand, mitigate, and escape issues that affect them, and which ultimately lead to their loneliness. This argument leads to great reform. As Martineau states it is the importance of women's education, to "let woman then be taught that her powers of mind were given her to be improved. Let her be taught that she is to be a rational companion to those of the other sex whom her lot in life is cast." Framing women's role as "companion" is important in understanding the complex discussion of women's roles. Though she argues she will not debate women's roles in the household, this statement shows her disdain for the social stratification of women. This disdain is a part of how female protagonists express loneliness when discussing their own gender-enforced roles in society.

Psychology and the Woman Question

In discussing the issues facing women in the Victorian period, it is important to discuss both Amélie Oksenberg Rorty's viewpoint on novel characters²² and Elaine Showalter's three phases of feminism within a "feminist" text.²³ Rorty offers an analysis of three types of protagonists

²¹ Martineau, Harriet. "On Female Education." *The Monthly Repository*, 1822.

²² Rorty, Amélie Oksenberg. "Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals." *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Ed. Michael McKeon. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000.

²³ Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from*

that can appear in any work in “Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals” and uses psychology to discuss character:

In its origins, the psychological theory of character derives traits and temperaments, dispositionally analyzed, from the balance of elements constituting an individual. The psychology of character rests in physiology. Since the elements out of which characters are composed are repeatable and their configurations can be reproduced, a society of characters is in principle a society of repeatable and indeed replaceable individuals.²⁴

Rorty argues that psychologically-driven characters are interchangeable because their experience is universal. She argues that many different characters can share the same feelings about major issues.²⁵ This use of universality can be applied to the underlying theme of loneliness in the novels this work analyzes. The psychological challenges the characters face is through the filter of loneliness. Eliot’s Maggie, Brontë’s Lucy and Marryat’s Harriet express crippling loneliness. Yet, the loneliness they express connects to their status as women. Lucy is lonely because she is poor and has no social connections, but more importantly because she is unable to connect to others for many reasons, one of which is her social immobility. Similarly, Hepworth Dixon’s Mary is left with few social connections and with the need to work. Both Lucy’s and Mary’s social position of needing to work leaves them with few social choices. The loneliness they express, while wanting to connect to someone on a deeper level, becomes impossible because of their constricting social roles. Complicating the need to work is the way in which this loneliness is related to marriage in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Though these protagonists express loneliness as a product of their social situations, as the following chapters argue, the protagonists express a desire to have their social status changed so that their loneliness will end. This direct connection of loneliness, and arguably interchangeable loneliness, to social situation argues for the universality of the need for change that Rorty examines in the creation of psychological characters.

Rorty’s ideas on character are also important in discussing the tie between the expression of loneliness and the call for change. It can be argued that the female protagonists are rallying against this designation of

Brontë to Lessing. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1977.

²⁴ Rorty, Amélie Oksenberg. “Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals.” *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Ed. Michael McKeon. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000, 539.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 539.

“character” within the text and the loneliness they feel represents what Rorty refers to in her section: “Soul and Mind:”

Because persons are primarily agents of principle, their integrity requires freedom; because they are judged liable, their powers must be autonomous. But when this criterion for personhood is carried to its logical extreme, the scope of agency moves inward, away from social dramas, to the choices of the soul, or to the operations of the mind...It is the will that chooses motives, that accepts or rejects desires, principles.²⁶

Will is important to the female protagonists in this work, but often they have no power to exert their own will. The loneliness that many female protagonists experience in the novel of the nineteenth century centers on the motives that force these characters to “reject desires” under the assumed social principles of the period. For instance, Marryat’s Harriet is told she must reject her own desires or risk a fatal injury to her husband. Though distraught about the news, she is ready to abandon her husband, but it is her husband who rejects the diagnosis, because as her husband, he rules over her needs. It is in Marryat’s work, where prescribed loneliness is important in denying unwanted women (in this case, an “infected” miscegenation) access to marriage and happiness, as the next evolution of the connection between loneliness and social inequity.

When discussing the feminist viewpoint in the nineteenth century it is pertinent to discuss Elaine Showalter’s three major phases of literary subcultures:

First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalizing* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, *Feminine*, *Feminists*, and *Female*...the phases overlap; there are feminist elements in feminine writing, and vice versa.²⁷

The phases that Showalter describes are a fitting description of the evolution of the Woman Question during the Victorian era, which evolves into the New Woman towards the end of the century because of the focus

²⁶ Ibid., 544.

²⁷ Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1977, 13.

on self-discovery. The new female icon, or New Woman, appears at the end of the century with Ouida's use of Sarah Grand's article "The New Aspects of the Woman Question." The creation of the New Woman through an on-going debate on women's roles is important in discussing the evolving nature of the psychology of loneliness as a social consequence within the novel.²⁸ Showalter's description of feminism will be the approach taken within this work.

Problems of Being New Women: *Fin de Siècle* and the New Woman

The discussion of feminism is important to understanding the shift in focus on women's rights toward the end of the century. Gail Cunningham, in the seminal work, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, argues that though not creating a definite school, the New Woman novelists were unified under themes of better education and a different role for female characters to play in fiction.²⁹ This idea is important in trying to discuss the term as it evolved toward the end of the century. Similarly, Talia Schaffer in "'Nothing But Foolscape and Ink': Inventing the New Woman" provides a solid history of the term "New Woman" and why it is controversial.³⁰ She discusses the different types of "New Women" to show how some aligned with affirming the differences of men and women, the view of the New Woman as a "beast" by many male critics, to the need for social change, the history of the term being coined in the press, to the use of female protagonists that align themselves as a part of the multi-faceted issue.³¹ What stands apart in her study is why the New Woman remains a part of fiction. At the heart of Schaffer's analysis, using both Ouida's and Sarah Grand's work, is the conception of the psychology of the New Woman in that "by treating the New Woman as a purely imaginary caricature, Ouida and Grand were able to stretch, distort, and duplicate this figure for whatever rhetorical or psychological purpose they wanted."³² This use of the New Woman as social construct is important in

²⁸ Ardis, Ann L. *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990, 11-25.

²⁹ Cunningham, Gail. *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*. London: Macmillan, 1978, 45-60.

³⁰ Schaffer, Talia. "'Nothing but Foolscape and Ink': Inventing the New Woman." *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*. Eds. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 39-42.

³² *Ibid.*, 47.

locating the uses of loneliness in the novels to be discussed. Schaffer furthers her discussion of the term, claiming that “by 1895, ‘New Woman’—like ‘politically correct’ a century later—had become a wildly skewed, reductive media construct which did not represent the real lives and work of those people it purported to describe.”³³ Though the term continues to be controversial, the culmination of the Woman Question debate was the discussion of the New Woman toward the end of the century.

Ann L. Ardis succinctly connects the issues facing women toward the end of the nineteenth century with social status when she writes that the New Woman, “for her transgressions against the sex, gender, and class distinctions of Victorian England [...] was accused of instigating the second fall of man.”³⁴ What Ardis argues, and Schaffer agrees, is that the New Woman novelists are the true forerunners to the realism that is to follow them in the twentieth century. But their realism stretches to an imagined sphere where “instead of assuming that art imitates reality and re-presents something both external and prior to the work of fiction, these authors figure desires that have never been realized before; they imagine worlds quite different from the bourgeois patriarchy in which unmarried women are deemed superfluous ‘side characters[s] in modern life.’”³⁵ Arguably, though some of the novels discussed in this work focus on marriage as a locus for many of the heroines, loneliness becomes the result of marriage for both Tess of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and Helen of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* due to forced social inequality and lack of agency. The Woman Question and the evolution of the New Woman are integral to this study on loneliness and to better understanding the social milieu facing women during this period. Lack continues to be layered through loneliness and lack of agency, but the lack is more explicitly stated in connection to lack of agency and the lonely characters at the end of the nineteenth century.

Chapters

The following chapters will take a historical approach to the evolution of the loneliness trope and lack of agency. Each chapter will primarily focus on two texts that exemplify the loneliness trope and lonely female

³³ Ibid., 49.

³⁴ Ardis, Ann L. *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990, 1.

³⁵ Ibid., 3.

protagonists. The conclusion touches on H. G. Wells' *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* and how the female protagonist attempts to end loneliness by regaining agency as the new century begins.

Chapter two focuses on Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. Each of these novels focus on lonely heroines. Loneliness expression is directly linked to the female protagonists' agency. In *Tenant*, the main character marries a wealthy man who abuses her. In her journal, she expresses her extreme loneliness and lack of agency, until she is forced to act to protect her son from becoming like his father.

In *Villette*, Lucy's loneliness is also tied to her status. Without family, and few friends, she is forced to make connections on her own. She continues friendless until M. Emmanuel falls in love with her, only to be lost at sea. Lucy's lonely state is a direct expression of her lack of agency. M. Emmanuel attempts to give her agency, with helping her start her own school, but she is still oppressed by one of the few employment options open to her and a lack of connection.

Chapter three focuses on George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Both Maggie and Tess are disconnected because of their status and intelligence. Maggie expresses her loneliness as she tries to achieve traditional gender roles, whereas Tess desires to maintain traditional roles but is held back by her husband's ideas of true femininity. Both characters lack of agency, and how they align with traditional female roles, is expressed through loneliness.

Chapter four develops another area of loneliness expression—the ways that loneliness is portrayed as the only option for women to accept their lack of agency. This loneliness expression is seen in two texts that revolve around doctors prescribing loneliness: *Blood of the Vampire* and *Heart and Science*. The female characters rally against these prescriptions, only to be forever changed by the male characters viewing the female characters as less than human.

Chapter five and six focus on the changes in loneliness expression as the century draws to a close. In works such as Lucas Malet's *Mrs. Lorimer* and *The Gateless Barrier*, as well as Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman*, female protagonists still connect loneliness expression to lack of agency, but more so than in the other narratives, they perceive their loneliness as directly connected to their status as women.

The conclusion focuses on areas that are directly tied to this issue, particularly fiscal standing, and how having money to achieve agency is important for female characters, such as Mrs. Harman in H. G. Wells' *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman*, a work set in the Victorian period where Wells

analyzes the Victorian mindset and values that shaped the era and the generations after it through a female character deciding what to do with her newfound agency as a financially secure widow.

Conclusion

The lonely image of the widow Queen Victoria, and the loneliness of female protagonists in the Victorian novel, portray a lack of social agency. Victoria is always wearing black because she is grieving her husband, and as many biographies attest, she never moves away, publicly, from this image. She is fettered by her role as wife, as many of the female protagonists to be discussed in this work are shackled with the social need to be wives or have some sort of social connection, as in the case of Brontë's Lucy Snowe and Eliot's Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*, or in several instances, lacking the ability to change their status after marriage, as is true for the protagonists Helen and Tess. Loneliness, when depicted in literature, is complex. The purpose of this work will be to explore the narrative function of loneliness as expressed by female protagonists with a clear discussion of how they are affected by social norms. Exploring the issues of Elaine Showalter's "literary subcultures" and the continued role that the Woman Question plays in the creation of female protagonists of the period will develop how loneliness informs the discussion of women's roles in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER TWO

FLEEING LONELINESS

“Lonely as I am—how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career—perseverence [sic] to plead through two long, weary years with publishers till they admitted me?”

—Charlotte Brontë’s correspondence to
W. S. Williams, July 3, 1849³⁶

As is noted in the introduction, this work argues that certain types of lonely female protagonists in the nineteenth-century novel argue for a shift in women’s social status through the expression of loneliness and lack of agency. This chapter, which focuses on Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853)³⁷ and Anne Brontë’s³⁸ *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)³⁹, discusses how the Brontës use loneliness in their novels as a call for this change.⁴⁰ Rorty argues, as I have shown in the introduction of this work, that when the “criterion for personhood is carried to its logical extreme, the scope of agency moves inward, away from social dramas, to the choices of the soul, or to the operations of the mind...[i]t is the will that chooses motives, that accepts or rejects desires, principles.”⁴¹ The female protagonists in each of

³⁶ Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Ed. Alan Shelston. London: Penguin Books, 1975.

³⁷ Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette*. Ed. Kate Lawson. Ontario: Broadview, 2006.

³⁸ For the rest of this chapter, the Brontës will be referred to by their first names.

³⁹ Brontë, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Ed. Herbert Rosengarten. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

⁴⁰ It is important to note that the Brontës are inextricably linked through biography. This critical link creates a challenge when looking at their work separately and this chapter is no exception to grouping the works together. Though this chapter places their works together in a time frame, I have resisted too many direct associations in lieu of discussing the connections in critical scholarship as a disservice to their works, in particular to Anne’s unfair treatment by critics who only apply her writings to her sisters’ work.

⁴¹ Rorty, Amélie Oksenberg. “Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals.” *Theory of*

these novels expresses loneliness in unique ways that bring to light the narrative purpose of loneliness in the text, which is to point out the importance of lack of agency facing women in the nineteenth century.

Both Charlotte's and Anne's works are important in discussing the zeitgeist in the time of their writing for many female writers. Both authors take a stance for women's rights in their personal and public writings and their subject matter is particularly attuned to the issues facing women of their day. The female characters that they write about express a desire for change in several ways. This chapter will focus on how the female main characters in both *Villette* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* experience loneliness as a result of their social situation and not only due to the lack of connection. Loneliness becomes an important narrative device in this discussion of the need for change.

Charlotte Brontë's Biographical Loneliness

Biographers and critics classify Charlotte as lonely later in life when *Villette* was composed. This link between her actual self and her work complicates the discussion of loneliness from a critical standpoint. Through this lens, readers of her work begin to blur the lines between fiction and Charlotte's biography. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, in their introduction to the 1984 Clarendon Press edition of *Villette*, discuss the "period between the publication of *Shirley* in October 1849, and the appearance of *Villette* in January 1853, [as] a time of unbearable loneliness and bitter depression, of recurring illness and nagging self-doubt [for Charlotte]...her need for companionship was so intense that it often numbed her creative faculties and rendered the effort of composition futile."⁴² Many biographies and critical works describe Charlotte as suffering from a crippling loneliness that affects her later work, in particular, *Villette*. Much of her correspondence, and the subsequent death of the rest of her family, supports this view of her. But this viewpoint does not allow for a deeper reading of Charlotte's use of loneliness—in these critics' reading, Charlotte's characters are lonely because she is lonely and for no other reason. The cyclical⁴³ nature of Charlotte's personal

the Novel: A Historical Approach. Ed. Michael McKeon.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000, 544.

⁴² Rosengarten, Herbert and Margaret Smith. "Introduction to *Villette*." *Villette*. By Charlotte Brontë. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1984, xi.

⁴³ I am referring to Julia Kristeva's views on temporality and female subjectivity. In Kristeva's view cyclical is repetition and its opposite is monumental time, or eternity (Moi, 1986, 187).

loneliness and her works, in particular: *Shirley* (1849), *Villette* and *The Professor* (1857), permeates almost every critical discussion of *Villette*. Helene Moglen begins her chapter on *Villette* with a discussion of Charlotte's previous work, *Shirley*, and her desire to create social awareness in the realism of the novel. Moglen focuses this discussion through Charlotte's letters to Elizabeth Gaskell. Charlotte's letters outline her views on the situation of women (using "our" to refer to women as a group) and the way in which men discuss the lack of social change as an "amelioration of [how] our condition depends on ourselves."⁴⁴ Charlotte ends this discussion with a comment on how social change for women seems impossible, writing, "Certainly there are evils which our own efforts will best reach; but as certainly there are other evils—deep rooted in the foundations of the social system—which no efforts of ours can touch; of which we cannot complain; of which it is adviseable [sic] not too often to think."⁴⁵ Due to the feeling of crushing social injustice, and her own personal loneliness, Moglen's argument is that these two points create a need for Charlotte to write *Villette* from a more personal standpoint, involving Charlotte's failed love affair with Constantin Heger and later, the death of her family, in that:

she had to confront directly—and at last—the one irreducible fact of her life: her loneliness. It had become an agonizing reality after she returned from Brussels to wait through two long years for the letters from Heger, which never came. And then, with the deaths of Branwell, Emily, and Anne, it seemed to be a nightmare from which she could not and never would awaken.⁴⁶

Moglen argues that writing *Villette* is a way for Charlotte to decipher her own past through the lens of a "confrontation of the self by the self."⁴⁷ Yet, why does Moglen shift abruptly from social awareness to loneliness? It would seem that this loneliness trope and social hierarchy are implicitly linked.

It would be a misreading, then, to offer an analysis of the loneliness described in *Villette* only as based in the author's personal tragedy. Elaine Showalter points out that Gaskell's view of Charlotte as a tragic figure has

⁴⁴ Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Ed. Alan Shelston. London: Penguin Books, 1975, 190.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁴⁶ Moglen, Helene. *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*. New York: Norton, 1976, 190-191.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

become a part of the “Brontë myth.”⁴⁸ The connections between Charlotte’s life and *Villette* make it apparent that not only is the loneliness in *Villette* functioning as personal narrative, as Moglen suggests, but loneliness could also be a part of the narrative of women’s social stratification. Moglen’s focus on self-discovery as a function of Charlotte’s writing is based on her own personal history, as many other critics coadjute;⁴⁹ however, it can be argued that Charlotte’s loneliness, regardless of personal history, is a part of her social status as a woman. As the quotation from her letters at the beginning of this chapter and to Gaskell elucidate, she was clear on her views on the social status of women and the ways in which these views affected her both professionally and personally.

Modern criticism of Charlotte, though not ignoring the connections between her life and her work, focuses on Lucy Snowe’s social connections. Diane Long Hoeveler and Lisa Jadwin in *Twayne’s English Authors Series* on Charlotte describe *Villette* as her “final novel, [that] may well be also her greatest work: it is a complex portrait of a woman living on the margins of her culture, a woman who must make her own way in the world and who cannot expect to be rescued by a benevolent patriarch.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Judith Mitchell addresses the discussion of agency in *Villette* in her work, *The Stone and the Scorpion: The Female Subject of Desire in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy*, when she argues that “Brontë’s final novel encompasses the solution to the central agonizing question posed by her other novels, the question of how a woman can best handle her own desire, given the dilemma of male dominance and female submission.”⁵¹ With this in mind, I would argue that Lucy’s discussions with an assumed audience (“dear reader”) about her lonely situation reinforce ways in which her loneliness is intrinsically linked to her social standing, or her lack thereof, creating a trope—the way loneliness is an expression of women’s stratification—throughout the novel.

By attacking what Mitchell describes as the “feminist polemic” that is “unconvincingly scattered” in *Shirley*, Mitchell argues for a discussion of

⁴⁸ Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1977, 106.

⁴⁹ Rosengarten and Smith

⁵⁰ Hoeveler, Diane Long and Lisa Jadwin. *Charlotte Brontë: Twayne’s English Authors Series*. Ed. Herbert Sussman. New York: Twayne, 1997, 108.

⁵¹ Mitchell, Judith. *The Stone and the Scorpion: The Female Subject of Desire in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994, 69.

events in *Villette* that focus on female social stratification.⁵² There are many moments in Lucy's narrative when she discusses women's roles; however, when discussing ethereal subjects, such as women's capacity for knowledge, the narrator moves back and forth between a discussion of the actual (for example, her own tutoring) and the perception of women. In the following example, the narrator discusses the idea that men and women are not much different in their expectations of people when M. Emmanuel is tutoring Lucy. At this later point, the narrative itself revolves around women and men and the ideas about their capacity for knowledge. It is a very problematic portion of the text, but Lucy, as narrator, frames the discussion of women learning (which, M. Emmanuel says he is opposed to, though he is continuously trying to teach her and other women) and equality. Lucy breaks the narrative to remark on the similarities between males and females when it comes to expectations in that "It appeared as if he could not be brought about to accept the homely truth, and take me for what I was: men, and women too, must have delusion of some sort; if not made ready to their hand, they will invent exaggeration for themselves."⁵³ Lucy, continuously skirting the question of female intelligence put forth by M. Emmanuel, often allows her own viewpoint to permeate her personal meditations on knowledge. These meditations often refer to men and women, as the quotation above suggests, as equal in their own follies.

Focusing on the style of Lucy's attempts at communication helps the analysis of Lucy's status as a woman. Though Mitchell furthers her discussion through a focus on desire instead of learning, she shows how Lucy Snowe's desire for companionship is a result of Charlotte's discussion of the status of women, which is reinforced throughout the narrative in different ways, such as through Charlotte's style. This sense of women's roles becomes important when analyzing Charlotte's style, as Margot Peters discusses in the use of antithesis as a function of Charlotte's use of character interaction. The use of contrasts becomes the focus of Peters' analysis:

Perhaps the most dramatic instance of structure based upon antithesis occurs in *Villette*. One of the most striking and persistent motifs of the novel is the theme of privation and plenty, a theme that is often expressed in balanced antithesis of hunger and nourishment...[f]ar from a casual metaphor, the fluctuation of Lucy Snowe's existence between emotional

⁵² Mitchell, Judith. *The Stone and the Scorpion: The Female Subject of Desire in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994, 69.

⁵³ Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette*. Ed. Kate Lawson. Ontario: Broadview, 2006, 427.

starvation and gratification, between have and have not, provides the basic structural pattern of the novel.⁵⁴

It is in these connections that Lucy's loneliness becomes a part of a feminist critique of the lack of agency, as is seen when Lucy compares her lonely state to that of Dr. John and Paulina. Lucy is the outsider who is frequently commenting on them as a couple—from the beginning of the text—as Lucy notes in her early depictions of Paulina and Graham that “As to Paulina, I observed that her little character never properly came out, except with young Bretton.”⁵⁵ Looking at others as couples, or through a duality because of common understanding, is in stark contrast to how she narrates herself. Early in the narrative she often pairs Graham and Mrs. Bretton or Graham and Paulina. When Paulina relates her sadness at her father leaving, both the Brettons are in rapt attention; however, Lucy narrates herself separately as “I, Lucy Stone, was calm.”⁵⁶ The Brettons' attention is in contraposition to Lucy's responsiveness to Paulina's distress, but this appraisal of their reactions also continues the disparity between how the Brettons respond to Lucy in comparison to Paulina. Similarly, Lucy does not respond as other characters relate to people. Her reaction to others, which usually separates her from others, is an important aspect of narrating loneliness.

Essentially, Terry Eagleton shares Peters' view of connections of “dis”connections, but expands this concept further in comparing *Jane Eyre* to Lucy when he argues that “the trajectory of both girls' careers is much the same: propelled from an initial settlement into the promise and terror of independence, both need to swallow back treacherous fantasies in the drive to carve a worldly niche.”⁵⁷ It is not new to compare the main characters of Charlotte's most famous novel and her last work, but Eagleton connects their social status directly to one of self-repression. This self-repression could be understood as a derivative of loneliness and it is in repression that Lucy continually defines and re-defines her own loneliness

⁵⁴ Peters, Margot. *Charlotte Brontë: Style in the Novel*. Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1973, 76-77.

⁵⁵ Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette*. Ed. Kate Lawson. Ontario: Broadview, 2006, 88.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 86. The narrative function of Lucy's use of third person can be considered in question. Certain portions of the text prove her use of third person as a device to distance the reader, and at other parts of the text the use of third person may function as a nuance of Lucy's multiple roles as narrator. The use of third person continues to transform throughout the text.

⁵⁷ Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Malden, New Jersey: Blackwell, 2005, 64-65.