A Selkie Tale: The Mythical Journey of the Charlotte Bronte Heroines

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ABSTRACT

This project offers a comparative analysis of Charlotte Bronte’s fiction and British folk tradition, juxtaposing Bronte’s female protagonists with the myth of the selkie (seal-humans of the North Sea) to highlight elements of Bronte’s feminist vision that are otherwise inconspicuous through existing methods. In Scottish, Irish, and Faroese folklore, the selkie is a marine seal who is trapped by a fisherman in her human form and is forced to live as his wife on land. To ensure submission and obstruct her return to the sea, the fisherman hides her seal-skin. Forced to live an alternative existence in a surrogate home, the selkie is thus much like the individualistic women in nineteenth-century England compelled to forgo their inner natures and submit to becoming “the angel in the house.” Selkie tales invariably conclude with the selkie finding her seal-skin
and leaving a grieving family on land to return to her original home, the sea. I argue that the Bronte heroines’ continual search of a space that grants them the opportunity to explore their subjectivity resembles the selkie’s search for her seal-skin. An in-depth character study of the female protagonists of *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853), “A Selkie Tale” demonstrates Bronte’s use of three homeless, single, and most importantly, non-fallen women to protest the loss of female subjectivity in three prominent Victorian institutions: the home, the family, and the literary circle. In three chapters, I analyze how a Bronte heroine passes through three characteristically Victorian spaces to gain individuation: the home, the trained female mind within the home, and the community around that home. Each chapter presents these domains alongside their reversals to illustrate Bronte’s understanding of the paradoxes present in nineteenth-century gender norms and gendered spaces. Hence, as the chapters explicate the theories of, what I term, *home* and *anti-home*, *self* and *anti-self*, *community* and *anti-community*, to corroborate my argument, I use the three stages of a selkie’s life in the mythical narrative where she experiences the conflicts of home, self, and community.

INDEX WORDS: Bronte, Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette, Selkie, Folklore, Home, Self, Community
A SELKIE TALE: THE MYTHICAL JOURNEY OF THE CHARLOTTE BRONTE

HEROINES

by

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DEDICATION

To, Maa, Baba, and Bibek
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The greatest thing I learned from Charlotte Bronte’s life and works is that to grow intellectually, a woman needs a comfortable home and an encouraging community. If I have grown, it is because I have received just that from the wonderful people in my life.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reading Charlotte Bronte in 2018

Recently, at Politics and Prose, a bookstore in Connecticut, Professor John Pfordresher spoke about his new book, *The Secret History of Jane Eyre* (2017). He explained the trials Charlotte Bronte endured to write and publish her masterpiece, *Jane Eyre* (1847). He spoke about the secrets she kept from the world – her name and her gender – to see her story reach the world. After the lecture, a member from the audience asked three short questions to the speaker: (i) is there any other writer in the Victorian period who wrote like Bronte did? (ii) did Bronte belong to any school of thought, and (iii) was Bronte’s legacy short-lived because she doesn’t seem to belong to one school of thought? Hearing the questions, Prof. Pfordresher chuckled. “I really can’t answer that,” he said. He only admitted that he had never come across another author who matched Bronte’s style or potential, calling her “inimitable.” Clearly, the speaker hid a stream of thoughts on Bronte’s inimitability, school of thought, and legacy behind his initial chuckle. Perhaps Prof. Pfordresher committed to a short answer because he realized that to speak extensively on the topic, he would need more words than what could be compressed in a single Q&A session. As I introduce my project, which focuses on Charlotte Bronte’s three spectacular novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853), I begin by presenting my own answers to the three questions asked to Prof. Pfordresher at his lecture. I do this for two reasons: first, to investigate how 1830s and 1840s, a unique period in British history, impacted Bronte’s artistic style and sentiment, second, to address the importance of reading a writer like Bronte in the present day.

Bronte is an inimitable author not only because she was a skilled writer, but also because she grew up in an extraordinary period in Britain. That is, born in 1816, she grew up in the 1820s
to 40s, decades that witnessed the advent as well as the peak of England’s industrialization. Despite living in a small town named Haworth in north of Yorkshire, Bronte was familiar with her nation’s social and political scene. An avid reader, Bronte’s sensibility was inspired by the Romantics. A keen observer, her writing was inspired by the rapidly changing Victorian world. Because she lived in a period of great change, Bronte didn’t hold or represent one school of thought. In fact, she wrote her four novels inspired by four separate mindsets and for four completely different reasons. Bronte’s biographer and friend, Elizabeth Gaskell, tells us in Life of Charlotte Bronte (1857) that in 1846, Bronte wrote The Professor to make ends meet. In the Preface of the novel, Bronte states that she writes the novel to show the world how a man should “work his way through life” (xxiii). What inspired the novel was her own feelings she harbored for her professor, Constantine Heger. In 1847, she wrote Jane Eyre to reattempt her hand at novel writing and partially to prove to her sisters that a heroine as plain and small as Bronte herself could be as interesting as other literary heroines.¹ Bronte states in the preface to The Professor that she chose the themes in her latter novels, i.e Jane Eyre, because her publishers who rejected her first novel wanted her to write, “something more imaginative and poetical—something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a taste for pathos, with sentiments more tender, elevated, unworldly” (xxiii). Bronte’s 1847 letter to her publisher, William S. Williams indicates that she wrote Shirley because she wanted to speak about the ongoing social issues regarding the ongoing Woman Question in England.² Similarly, Gaskell tells us that Bronte wrote Villette to revise The Professor. Evidently, Bronte’s four novels are born from four different sentiments and inspirations. From 1846 to 1853, Bronte evolved as a writer and a social

¹ According to Gaskell, Bronte said to Emily and Anne, “I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours”
² When asked what her next novel will be about, Bronte writes to Williams the following words, “I often wish to say something about the ‘condition of women’ question …”
thinker with such fervor that it is impossible to claim that she represents one school of thought in history. Her legacy, therefore, was short-lived because no other author, due to their changing time period, embraced the opportunity to become a dynamic thinker. No other writer succeeded Bronte’s style and sentiment because no other time mirrored the period she lived in.

What is fascinating about the current age in the United States is how similar our time, mood, and temperament are similar to that of mid-nineteenth-century Britain. In 1831, Dr. Thomas Arnold writes, “We have been living, as it were, the life of three hundred years in thirty,” reflecting on the changing world around him. Intriguingly, the same observations can be made about the third millennium, especially, the present-day US. Just like Bronte’s mind and her talents was nourished in the decades that witnessed the advent of industrialization, we have lived through the decades that have witnessed extraordinary growth in technological advancements. Sir Walter Besant once said about the Victorian period that because the changes in it had been so rapid, he wouldn’t have been able to recognize his own grandfather even if he wanted to. Today, the same can be said about our grandmothers.

In addition to sharing the knowledge and the emotion of what it feels like to be at the brink of another revolution (then, the industrial, now, the automation revolution), 1830s and 40s England and 2000s and 10s United States share another grand similarity – increasing social unrest within society due to minority groups displaying resistance to social inequality. In 1838, six members of the British parliament and six working class men formed a group called People’s Charter. They asked the government to allow working-class men to participate in the country’s law making by allowing them to vote and by protecting that vote through secret ballot. Simply put, the People’s Charter sought social equality. Like England saw the rise of the Chartists, in the last fifteen years...

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3 Letters on the Social Conditions of the Operative Classes (1831-2)
years, United States has witnessed several marginalized groups publicly demand equal treatment
in law and in society. For example, we have witnessed the rise of same-sex marriage movement,
Black Lives Matter movement, Women’s March, #MeToo campaign, and so on. Evidently the
social, political, and scientific sentiment Bronte grew up observing and sensing is like what we
are observing now. Hence, to read novels written by a woman author, living in a remote village
in Yorkshire, struggling to find her place in a male-centric and somewhat London-centric literary
sphere is profoundly meaningful and significant now. There is a lot to examine about the
methods she used, the themes she chose, and the manner she regulated – and sometimes even hid
– her feminine voice. It is crucial to study how Bronte participated in critique of her
contemporary society by voicing her concerns assertively, yet delicately, having to remain
conventionally feminine – a challenge women face even today. We have seen notable women
like Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Warren openly discuss the challenges of a woman compelled
to soften her voice, language, and demeanor to ensure her message is received by her audience,
while the same rule is inapplicable for her male counterpart. Bronte, who outlived such
discrimination nearly two centuries ago, is therefore a significant literary figure relevant in the
present day. There is a lot to learn from how she used art to comment as well as reflect on the
rapidly changing society; there is a lot to learn from her techniques. “A Selkie Tale” is an
investigation of such techniques through a carefully chosen method – the selkie myth.

1.2 A Selkie Tale

My dissertation is a feminist study that investigates Bronte’s treatment of social and
psychological issues faced by women in nineteenth-century Britain. It juxtaposes Bronte’s
women-centric novels, namely, *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853), with the
selkie tales from British folklore to argue that such pairing helps uncover aspects of Bronte’s
feminist vision that are otherwise elusive through existing methods of interrogation. In addition, I address and resolve some significant critical concerns scholars have showcased over the years regarding Bronte’s characters and narratives. For instance, critics like Erin Nyborg and Nancy Quick Langer, to name a few, have often lamented Bronte’s conscious restoration of “male authority in the domestic realm” (Saginni and Soccio 3) in novels like *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849). Postcolonial thinkers like Gayatri Spivak have expressed concerns with the representation of Bertha Mason, the famous madwoman in *Jane Eyre*. Feminist scholars have frequently questioned Bronte’s decision to resolve *Shirley*’s narrative with double-marriage despite infusing the novel with a strong female lead (Shirley Keeldar) who promises to live a feminist life independent of the conventional male-care. Critics have also debated whether *Shirley* is a social novel about the early nineteenth-century Luddite movement or a romance involving a rector’s niece and a millowner, often concluding that the novel’s confusing premise makes its characters and events disjointed. Scholars of narratology, on the other hand, have frequently expressed their dissatisfaction in the style of Lucy Snowe’s first-person narration in *Villette* (1853). Some even state that she spends too much time ruminating than acting.

Addressing these questions, I argue that many incomprehensible and questionable aspects of Bronte’s works can be resolved using the selkie myth as a companion tale to understand Bronte’s narratives.

In Scottish, Irish, and Faroese folklore, the selkie is a marine seal who is trapped by a fisherman in her human form and is forced to live as his wife on land. To ensure submission and obstruct her return to the sea, her original home where she lives as a seal, the fisherman hides her seal-skin. Forced to live an alternative existence in a surrogate home, the selkie is thus much like the individualistic women in nineteenth-century England compelled to forgo their inner natures
and submit to becoming “the angel in the house.” Selkie tales invariably conclude with the selkie finding her seal-skin and leaving a grieving family on land to return to the sea. I argue that the Bronte heroines’ continual search of a space that grants them agency and independence resemble the selkie’s search for her seal-skin. An in-depth character study of the female protagonists of Jane Eyre, Shirley, and Villette, “A Selkie Tale” demonstrates Bronte’s use of three homeless, single, and most importantly, non-fallen women to protest the loss of female subjectivity in three prominent Victorian institutions: the home, the family, and the literary circle.

In my project, I use the selkie myth as – what T. S. Eliot would call – “the catalyst” (55). In his essay titled, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), Eliot claims that a poet’s work is never solely a product of his or her individual talent. In fact, the work is always an amalgamation of the poet’s talent, experience, history, tradition, and his or her literary ancestry. To theorize this, Eliot brings forth an analogy. He briefly speaks of the use of the element, platinum, in a mixture of two gases, suggesting that the poet’s mind is like a piece of platinum in a chemical reaction. Literature moves forward because catalysts like individual talents take it forward. Eliot writes,

I shall, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide … When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged (56).
In other words, platinum, the catalyst in this chemical reaction, is an entity that doesn’t change the nature of the substance it meets with, but when put together, the platinum enhances the substance’s lucidity. Borrowing this very analogy, I claim that in this project, the selkie myth is the catalyst like the platinum. Reading the myth alongside the novels doesn’t change their meaning. Instead, it illuminates aspects of Bronte’s feminist sentiment and vision that are otherwise unseen through existing methods of study. It is only by reading the selkie myth as a companion tale for Bronte’s novels that these aspects of her writing come to surface. To elucidate, Bronte scholars have always found the existence of a relationship between Bronte’s novels and the concept of home and self. However, once the Bronte heroine is juxtaposed with the selkie, one discovers how deeply and skillfully Bronte addresses women’s issues regarding home (woman’s role in the domestic sphere), or self (woman’s individuality in family), or community (woman’s place in society) in her novels. In addition, by designing spaces, scenes, and characters that act as their reversals (anti-home, anti-self, and anti-community – concepts I will explicate soon), Bronte challenges these concepts by demanding a reassessment. Simply put, Bronte suggests that when it comes to women’s lives, the Victorian notions of home, self, and community are convoluted, and these ideas should therefore be redefined. To present my conclusions coherently, I introduce the following concepts: the theory of home and anti-home, the theory of self and anti-self, the theory of community and anti-community. Since the words ‘home,’ ‘self,’ and ‘community’ are common terms in the English language, I deliberately put home, self, and community in italics so that my readers understand that the italicized words are the redefined versions of their original counterparts. Similarly, anti-home, anti-self, and anti-community are their reversals.
In three chapters, each separately dedicated to one of the three novels, I examine how Bronte enables her heroine to evaluate her home, self, and community to reject them and instead find home, self, and community. That is, in chapter 1, I study how Jane Eyre encounters and evaluates several homes to discover their insalubrious sides and finally find a home in Ferndean. In chapter 2, I examine how Lucy Snowe encounters multiple versions of her own self in Villette to discover her self and live a life independent of societal conventions. In chapter 3, I analyze Caroline Helstone’s encounters with multiple social groups in Shirley to understand where her true community is. In their search of home, self, and community, these heroines confront the anti-home, anti-self, and anti-community, revealing Bronte’s ability to identify the paradoxical nature of norms that surround nineteenth-century spaces and selves. Hence, as each chapter explicates the theories of home and anti-home, self and anti-self, community and anti-community, to corroborate my argument, I use the three stages of a selkie’s life in the mythical narrative where she experiences similar conflicts.

1.3 Home and Anti-Home: Jane Eyre’s Subjective Space

This chapter examines Bronte’s treatment of ‘home’ in Jane Eyre and pairs Jane’s journey with the first stage of the selkie’s life: the selkie’s relocation from the sea to her husband’s house on land. Doing so, it traces Bronte’s feminist standpoint on the ideologies surrounding the Victorian domestic sphere. Bronte believes that the nineteenth-century domestic sphere has two kinds of spaces within it: (i) a space of comfort for an individualistic woman and (ii) a space of discomfort. I term these spaces home and anti-home respectively. I argue that because Bronte takes her protagonist through several anti-homes to have her settle in a home, one can conclude that Bronte believes every woman should assess their home to evaluate its ability to grant them independence and agency. That is, a woman must always be in an active search of
home – a space that grants her the opportunity to discover her inner self. In that process, she must always reject the anti-home – a space that forces her to embrace only her social role.

While Jane Eyre’s decisions throughout the narrative demonstrate Bronte’s intimation, the selkie’s transition from her sea-life to a life on land explains it further. In the sea, the selkie is a seal who carries the autonomy to transform into a human. She lives independently. On land, she loses her agency and must obey the rules of society. That is, first, she is confined to her human form. Second, she is stripped from the means (her seal-skin) that will take her back to her original home. On land, the selkie adapts, builds a family, and becomes dutiful and submissive. Although she is loved by her husband, he doesn’t set her free. Gradually, she grows restless. Hence, the selkie’s life begins from home and reaches the anti-home. Similarly, in Jane Eyre, her uncle, although well intentioned, takes Jane away from her original home, her parent’s house, to Gateshead that becomes Jane’s anti-home. Her experience at Gateshead becomes so traumatic that Jane spends the rest of her years moving from one house to the other in search of home. This is demonstrated by Jane’s continual attempt to find a space where she is free and autonomous. Before finding home in Ferndean, Jane moves from Gateshead to Lowood, Thornfield, and then to Moor House. She remains in a house as long as it offers her home. However, as soon as she encounters an anti-home, Jane abandons the place altogether. Like the selkie, restlessness ensues her in her anti-homes: “I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes” (J.E 129). Evidently, by creating a heroine who is incessantly in search of a comfortable space for herself where she can live with respect and independence, Bronte suggests that women do the same.

From an analysis of Jane’s journey, I identify Bronte’s displeasure with the existing Victorian notions on home. By juxtaposing Jane’s journey alongside the selkie’s, in addition to
making Jane’s mobility and restlessness authentic, I also uncover an aspect of her character that is new to Bronte scholarship: Jane’s animality. Intriguingly, whenever Jane is inside home regardless of the house she is in, she chooses to see herself as a non-human. Conversely, in her anti-home, Jane’s humanness is emphasized. For instance, at Gateshead, by the window-seat, Jane identifies herself with a bird. In the same house, inside the red-room (anti-home), Jane is forced to come to terms with her human-side by encountering extreme fear and collapsing. In Thornfield, when she finds home near Rochester, she rejoices in becoming a fairy, a witch, a nymph, an elf, and so on. In Thornfield’s anti-home, the third story where Bertha lives, Rochester highlights Jane’s humanness by contrasting her with Bertha’s madness, an action by Rochester that displeases Jane immensely. Unsurprisingly, moving from one anti-home to other, Jane settles only at Ferndean where she finds seclusion and a blind partner who has become akin to an animal himself: “I see you are being metamorphosed into a lion” (J.E 461).

Living in a time of rapid changes in the nineteenth-century society, writing Jane Eyre, Bronte demands a change in people’s perception regarding one of the core Victorian institutions – the home. She identifies the paradox deep within the viewpoint, “the domestic sphere is a woman’s sphere.” If a woman must fulfill a social and generic role (daughter, mother, wife, ‘angel in the house’) in the domestic sphere, how is it her own sphere? Therefore, Bronte creates the rebellious and audacious Jane Eyre to encourage women to reject all anti-homes until they find their homes.

1.4 Self and Anti-Self: The Two Lives of Lucy Snowe

The second chapter, “Self and Anti-self: The Two Lives of Lucy Snowe,” examines Bronte’s understanding of the female ‘self’ through a detailed reading of Lucy Snowe’s self-discovery in Villette. By juxtaposing Lucy’s self-awareness with the selkie’s ability to discern
during her time in the *anti-home*, I reveal Bronte’s feminist standpoint on the Victorian notion of femininity. That is, Lucy’s narrative tells us that in Bronte’s observation of her society, a Victorian woman lives in either of the two ways: in her *self* or in her *anti-self*. I argue that while Bronte believes a woman should always be in search of *home*, in that process, she must also be aware of her true nature (*self*) as part of her personality that is independent of her imposed, social role (*anti-self*). Is she a wife (*anti-self*), or a wife who is also a painter who would sometimes rather paint uninterrupted by her husband (*self*)? Is she a daughter (*anti-self*), or a daughter who is also a novelist who would write rather than perform the household chores expected of her (*self*)? In other words, Bronte demands a reassessment of female’s role in the family.

While a detailed textual analysis of Lucy’s ruminations and monologues demonstrate Bronte’s notion, the second stage of selkie’s life explain the matter further. When the selkie is on land, she adapts to the changed circumstances knowing that her humanhood is her only chance at survival. She becomes a dutiful wife, reciprocates her husband’s love, and bears him children. However, as time passes, her restlessness intensifies. The urge to return to the sea grows and she struggles to identify herself. Is she a human-wife and a mother or is she a wife, a mother, and also a seal who would rather be in the sea? Realizing that her true nature is in her animalhood, the selkie then begins a search for her seal-skin that had been hidden by her husband during her capture. Hence, she begins her journey toward *home* not because she is unhappy in her *anti-home*, but because she realizes that in that space, she is only living a surrogate identity (*anti-self*). Similarly, in *Villette*, Lucy Snowe remains in an *anti-home* only until she thinks that her *anti-self* is her true nature. As soon as she locates her *self*, her anonymity, she begins her journey toward *home*. 
Evidently, Bronte suggests that Victorian women are only living a life of duty, while they must pursue a life of thought, ambition, and desire. In an 1836 letter to Robert Southey, the twenty-one-year old Bronte writes, “sometimes when I am teaching or sewing, I’d rather be reading or writing” (), demonstrating that she is able to identify a self that is independent of her anti-self. Palpably, for Bronte, a Victorian woman is trapped in her anti-home only until she thinks her anti-self is her real self. As soon as she realizes that the anti-self is just a part of her and not her essential nature, she is equipped to search for a home.

This chapter performs a psychological analysis of Lucy’s divided selfhood in Villette to demonstrate Bronte’s belief that an individualistic woman can break away from the realm of ‘the angel’ only when she can see her existence in two possibilities. While I examine the effects of home and anti-home on female subjectivity in chapter 1, here, I investigate Bronte’s prescribed method of outliving the anti-home. In other words, how does one break away from the position of an angel and become a thinking and feeling individual? As I critically scrutinize the scenes where Lucy undergoes self-division, I find that Lucy displays an extraordinary ability to divide her existence into two categories whenever she faces an anti-home; she reminds herself that she is living in an anti-self. Hence, Lucy escapes the anti-home in various houses because she recognizes the difference between self and anti-self. Just like the selkie is able to escape her husband’s home only after she accepts that she is, in essence, a seal.

By analyzing the scenes in Villette where Lucy feels comfortable, I deduce that Lucy’s self is her anonymity. Lucy, as a character as well as a narrator, rejoices in hiding herself. She is an infamously unreliable narrator and a secretive character. The more she falls prey to scrutiny (as performed by M. Paul and Madame), the more she weakens. As I survey such scenes, I claim that Lucy’s love for anonymity reflects Bronte’s interest in remaining ‘incognito’ in the
nineteenth-century literary sphere. Moreover, Lucy’s self-division finds its inspiration from Bronte’s life as well. As Bronte’s friend and biographer Elizabeth Gaskell notes in *Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857), Bronte understood very early on that to survive as an individualistic and ambitious woman in nineteenth-century England, a woman has to realize that her identity is divided irreconcilably into two: who she essentially is and who she must project herself as.

1.5 **Community and Anti-Community: Caroline Helstone’s Society**

This chapter examines Bronte’s treatment of ‘community’ through a detailed analysis of Caroline Helstone’s movement from one social group to the other in *Shirley*. I argue that by infusing *Shirley*’s narrative with multiple, seemingly disconnected, social to political groups, Bronte suggests that a woman’s journey to discovering her *self* and *home* is impossible without the support from a group of individuals who nourish her individuality. I call such group her *community*. Conversely, the group that restricts her distinctiveness and reminds her of her social role is her *anti-community*. I explain this concept by juxtaposing *Shirley*’s narrative with the third stage of the selkie’s life: her return to the sea where she reunites with her seal-folk. This chapter, in addition to analyzing the role of society toward the growth of an individual female mind, also engages with biographical criticism. That is, it studies the relationship between Bronte’s life events that occur in 1848 to 1849 and *Shirley*, the work she composes during that period.

In the selkie tale, after finding her seal-skin, the selkie returns to her seal-folk in the sea, the group she had been separated from initially during her capture. Hence, her story begins when she is in her *community*. After her capture, she joins the fisherman and the human society, her *anti-community* as the people in it restrict her return to *self* and *home*. Finally, when the selkie discovers her seal-skin, she returns to join those who are like her, in their *selves*. Similarly,
Bronte begins the narrative of *Shirley* by placing Caroline in her *community*, i.e., with Robert. Soon, as her uncle orders her to stay away from Robert and the Moores, Caroline finds herself trapped in her *anti-home*. She encounters the Sykes women, the old maids of Briarfield, and the rector’s friends, all who are unable to recognize Caroline’s need to be her *self*. It is only when the novel’s titular character, Shirley Keeldar and Shirley’s governess, Mrs. Pryor enter that Caroline finds her *community* again. The dying Caroline recovers in their presence and ultimately marries Robert. Like the selkie, Caroline passes through similar stages of being stripped from her *community* to being misunderstood by her *anti-community* to rediscovering her *community* again.

Writing *Shirley* and making her heroine, Caroline, encounter several social and political groups, Bronte clearly suggests that a woman’s growth is dependent on the support she receives from her communities. I conclude this by studying the narrative of *Shirley* as well as the Bronte’s life during its composition. After Bronte begins writing her second novel in 1848, her brother, Branwell Bronte, dies of tuberculosis in September of that year. Two months later, her sister, Emily Bronte, passes away catching the same fever. Five months later, in May of 1849, Bronte’s final surviving sibling, Anne Bronte, passes away. In September of 1849, *Shirley* is published. Because *Shirley’s* composition and three deaths in the Bronte household coincide, I argue that Bronte’s second novel is undoubtedly about an individual woman’s support system. While Bronte loses her *community* (her siblings) in a span of nine months, she mourns and completes her novel with the help of another *community*, one consisting of her best friends, Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor, and her publisher, William S. Williams. Finally, she receives the strength to participate in her artistic endeavors due to the presence of a third *community*, consisting of authors Elizabeth Gaskell and Harriet Martineau. Having benefited from such groups of individuals who support and nourish her individuality throughout her life, it is arguable that
Bronte writes *Shirley* to comment on the advantages of having a *community* and conversely, on the disadvantage of mixing with the wrong group of people – the *anti-community*. By representing the notion of companionship in such terms, I argue that Bronte: (a) contributes to Victorian England’s feminisms showing what types of communities are beneficial for women and what types are detrimental and (b) questions the likes of Victorian literary and political spheres that deny women their rightful share and voice.

### 1.6 Conclusion

The conclusion of my dissertation substantially engages with Bronte’s biographies and letters to investigate why she writes so intently on topics regarding home, self, and community. I discover that like Jane Eyre, Bronte lived in five houses in total during her life time. Like Lucy Snowe, Bronte was able to differentiate her true self from her social self – and ability that helped her write and publish. Finally, like Caroline, Bronte too depended on her friends to build her career and later, to continue it successfully. In addition to examining Bronte’s biographies and letters for such investigation, I also analyze Bronte’s poetry to study how these themes appear in her other artwork. Finally, I discuss *The Professor* (1857), a novel Bronte writes in 1846 but is published posthumously and examine why it is Bronte’s least popular work of fiction. Essentially, I argue that *Jane Eyre, Shirley, and Villette* become successful at conveying Bronte’s message because she writes these novels earnestly, i.e, in her *self*. On the other hand, I demonstrate that Bronte writes *The Professor* in her *anti-self*. That is, she writes the novel being overtly conscious of what is expected from a nineteenth-century novelist rather than being free of the social pressure and expectations.
1.7 Selkie Tales in Folklore and Literature

Before I begin my chapters, it is essential that my readers are familiar with the selkie myth and the manners in which it appeared in British literature, especially during the Victorian period. Selkies are seals with transformative abilities. When in sea, they area seals. When on land, they turn into humans by shedding their seal-skins to sunbathe. In folklore, selkies are also known as the ‘seal people.’ According to legend, selkies usually appear in the shores of Shetland, Orkney, and Faroe Islands of the North Sea. Sophia Kingshill, in The Lore of Scotland: A Guide to Scottish Legends, describes them:

Beneath the sea, according to tradition, there lives a race of people like humans but more beautiful. In their enchanted kingdom they have air to breathe, but in order to pass through the ocean which separates them from mankind, they have to take another form, usually that of a seal. On land they can remove their magical skin, but if they lose it, they must remain where they are (72).

Reasons for selkies to shed their skins while on the shores and reveal their human forms vary. In County Folklore, a book that holds an extensive collection of printed tales from Orkney and Shetland Islands, collector G. F. Black and editor Northcote W. Thomas describe the various ways in which selkies appear on land. According to Thomas, while selkie males assume human form to seduce “earth-born” women, selkie females assume human form to only “bask in the sunshine” (172). He further writes, “Indeed, to see a bevy of these lovely creatures, their seal skins doffed, disporting themselves in sea-side rock was enough to fire with admiration the coldest heart” (171). He also distinguishes the selkie from a mermaid citing it to be an important and often forgotten distinction.

Kingshill mentions above how the loss of the selkie skin forbids the selkie from returning
to sea. Thomas explains this. According to his research of folklore, typically, on a sunny day, selkies are seen in their human forms sitting on sea-rocks in their flocks. “The moment any disturbance [arises], or alarm [is] given, the whole flock [flings] their sea garments on, and leap into the sea” (172). The disturbance Thomas talks about, generally comes in form of fishermen who aim to steal the selkie woman’s seal skin. The fishermen know that if a selkie woman loses her skin, she has no other option than to marry him and spend the rest of her days as his wife. Her only chance of returning to sea is if she finds the skin that has been originally hidden by her captor lover. A selkie bride, therefore, no matter how happy she is on land with her husband and children, is always looking for her skin so that she can return to her original home. No matter how much her husband surrounds her with wealth and love, the selkie bride is never satisfied in land and the sea always calls her back.

The selkie-bride often appears in literature and arts. In *Strange and Secret Peoples* (1999), Carole G. Silver discusses their appearance in works of writers such as Archibald Campbell and William Sharp. Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy’s book, *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature*, on the other hand, mention that during the Victorian period, the figure of the mermaid-bride was more popular than that of the selkie-bride when it came to fairy tales that brought the union of a human and an otherworldly creature (or an animal) into their narratives. From Dorothy Dinnerstein, Gilbert and Gubar, and Auerbach, we know that the figure of a mermaid appears in literature as a demonic character who allures a man and drowns him – sometimes metaphorically and sometimes literally – into the sea. Therefore, unlike other sea nymphs such as mermaids and sirens who appear in literature as the villain, the selkie is a much innocent being in representation. Stories like “The Selkie Bride” and “The Fisherman’s Wife” in

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4 Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley* is an exception
the Victorian period that actually feature the figure of the selkie as a character only speak of her perpetual longing for the sea and her eventual return to it.

Silver notes that it was during the 1880s in British literature that the fairy brides began appearing as popular motif in Victorian stories and poetry. She further explains, “By the 1880s and thereafter Victorian folklorists focused their concern on the marriage relations of fairies and mortal men found in the swan maiden tales and on the social and cultural explanations of these phenomena” (92). 1880s being the decade of “debate on the origins of matrimony” (93), Silver states that such subjects for stories were not at all surprising. Hence, it seems like in the first half of the nineteenth century, sea fairies appear in literature as a demonic figure and in the latter half, especially in the 1880s, as mentioned above, the fairies appear, according to Silver, only to serve as “comments on matrimonial conflicts,” or “offer new perspectives on questions of marriage” (93). Although present in the Victorian literature corpus, the mythical figure of the selkie, or the archetype of the selkie-bride is still new to literary criticism.

2 HOME AND ANTI-HOME: JANE EYRE’S SUBJECTIVE SPACE

In the final pages of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), narrating her peaceful life at Ferndean, the eponymous heroine declares, “My Edward and I, then, are happy” (477) and for a hundred and seventy years, readers have rarely questioned Jane’s declaration. Studies that investigate the novel’s denouement have paid greater attention to the characters and elements of Jane’s journey than the quality, competence, and suitability of her destination – Ferndean manor. Criticism that does speculate Ferndean’s role in the novel restrict the manor’s value to the flora found on its exterior, creating a gap in *Jane Eyre* scholarship that makes way for questions such as: What makes Jane, the eternal-traveler, Abeona’s very own Victorian daughter, finally resolve
her lifelong search of home and settle happily at Ferndean?\(^5\) What does the manor provide that Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, and Marsh End collectively lack?

If one attempts to see Jane’s inheritance and independence as a possible answer to such questions, Marsh End is evidently better suited to house the heroine. In Marsh End, Jane finds comfort in a new name, employment, and from an unexpected inheritance, she also finds wealth accompanied by new relations. Regardless, Jane remains unfulfilled.\(^6\) If her love for Rochester, on the other hand, is Jane’s true reason for her return, she wouldn’t have told her cousins at Marsh End that her trip to “hear news of a friend [Rochester]” would be “four days” (487).\(^7\) She would have planned a longer visit. Given such circumstances, it does seem plausible that the sight of Thornfield’s ruin and the news of Rochester’s first wife’s (Bertha Mason) death is what helps Jane rekindle with Rochester and decide to live at Ferndean. However, in chapter twenty-seven, when Jane is at the verge of leaving Thornfield, as she contemplates abandoning Rochester, she states that her pride restricts living outside the sanction of marriage. However, in chapter thirty-six, when Jane revisits Rochester at Ferndean, she embraces the same “impropriety” (*JE* 460) she rejects before and indiscreetly announces,

> If you won’t let me live with you, I can build a house of my own close up to your door […] I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will

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5 Abeona is the Roman Goddess of outward journeys who protects children and travelers

6 Narrating her time at Morton as a respected school teacher, Jane explains how her new life gives her respect, but she continues to feel incomplete. She states, “At this period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than sank with dejection: and yet, reader, to tell you all, in the midst of this calm […] I used to rush into strange dreams at night […] dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; […] Then I awoke […] trembling and quivering; and then the still, dark night witnessed the convulsion of despair, and heard the burst of passion (393)

7 In Chapter 36 of *Jane Eyre*, Jane, deciding to visit Rochester, tells her readers, “At breakfast I announced to Diana and Mary that I was going a journey, and should be absent at least four days” (447). Her ruminations indicate her intention to visit Rochester only temporarily: “‘Your master himself may be beyond the British Channel, for aught you know: and then, if he is at Thornfield Hall, towards which you hasten, who besides him is there? His lunatic wife: and you have nothing to do with him: you dare not speak to him or seek his presence” (451), she tells herself.
be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. (459-60)

Such self-contradiction makes it difficult for a reader to confidently place Bertha Mason’s death as the prime reason for Jane’s decision to stay at Ferndean because Jane’s own battle of choices between love and self-respect takes centrality not only at the time of her desertion of Thornfield, but also during her acceptance of Ferndean. Furthermore, ever since Jane enters Ferndean, Bertha is not once mentioned or recalled by the first-person narrator. Naturally, one may conclude that there is something, then, left to discover about Ferndean; something about the manor that helps a character as restive as Jane Eyre, settle down.

In 1955, Edgar F. Shannon, discussing how Ferndean stands as an apt shelter for the wounded and wandering Jane, identifies an indubitable promise in its foliage. He writes,

[Rochester’s] and Jane’s reunion takes place against a benign background of profuse vegetation, and life-giving water bathes Ferndean when she arrives. The name itself, meaning “fern valley” [...] supplies a benediction connoting shelter and repose (144)

Shannon presents one of the first, in-depth examinations of the manor. In retrospect, he also begins a trend of limiting any critical conversation surrounding Ferndean and its therapeutic potentials to its ferny periphery. Therefore, in criticism, until the year 2000, Ferndean suffers in two ways: critics either confine its usage to its vegetation or, Ferndean remains as a backdrop, hidden under the weight of events that take place upon it. After Shannon, in 1966, Robert Bernard Martin, admiring Ferndean’s natural setting, claims that the house provides the novel’s ending an “autumnal quality” (90) because of its quiet and reconciliatory mood. While Shannon and Martin admire Ferndean’s natural terrain, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their seminal work, Madwoman in the Attic, pair Ferndean’s remoteness with Jane and Rochester’s need of
isolation. “True minds, Charlotte Bronte seems to be saying, must withdraw into a remote forest, a wilderness even, in order to circumvent the strictures of a hierarchal society” (369), they claim. Eventually calling Ferndean “a natural paradise” (370), Gilbert and Gubar expound on Jane’s joyous pronouncement that she and Rochester are happy. In We Are Three Sisters, a work that evaluates Bronte’s understanding and representation of family life in literature, Drew Lamonica states that from Gateshead to Ferndean, Jane marks a “physical and temporal journ[ey] from house to ‘home’ – from rejection […] to acceptance” (68). Although Lamonica recognizes Ferndean as a space that grants Jane “personal fulfillment” (69), in her reading, the manor remains at the background and secondary to her argument. For instance, she writes, “Ferndean seems […] to house both the self and kin: Jane is confident that her ‘self’ is not lost in her reunion with Rochester […]” (93), thus foregrounding Jane’s reunion (the event) over Ferndean (the setting). In a similar fashion, Laura Tommaso claims that Jane becomes “the model of domestic tranquility and marital bliss” at Ferndean because the manor gives her, “both self and family” (89). Hence, Tommaso diminishes Ferndean’s exclusivity as well. Likewise, in Mistress of the House, Tim Dolin dismisses the manor’s distinctiveness altogether by comparing it to a lifeless drawing room incapable of providing the heroine anything more than an ending that is suited for a traditional Victorian woman. Dolin writes, “[Jane] may finally venture out of her window seat, but she does not need to go very far, for her destination is the drawing room” (55). On the other hand, in his study that recognizes Jane as a character conveniently marginalized by others to oppress, John G. Peters claims that Jane and Rochester reunite at the novel’s closing moments because they are both outsiders (67). With such observation, Peters comes close to acknowledging the significance of Ferndean’s location, which is inside the woods and outside the social crowd. However, he only states, “[Jane and Rochester] remain both physically and
spiritually outside society and its norms” (67), overlooking the need to extend the discussion to address Ferndean’s unique position.

While some authors find hope in Ferndean’s greenery, critics like Pauline Nestor, Susan Meyer, and Huang Mei comment on the dark atmosphere the dense foliage entails. Nestor calls attention to the dampness required for the growth of fern plants and argues that Jane’s decision to live in Ferndean is not only unhealthy, but also similar to St. John’s decision of heading toward a definite doom in foreign lands. Meyer, on the other hand, agrees that Ferndean provides an unhealthy home to Jane and further compares its darkness with the damp upper story room of Thornfield where Grace Poole looks after Bertha. Taking Meyer’s observation a step further, in Transforming the Cinderella Dream, Mei claims that Ferndean is even darker than Thornfield’s attic. She writes,

The Rochesters’ new home – their earthly Eden – is a lonely and unhealthy place, to which Rochester’s Victorian conscience has forbidden him to commit his mad wife Bertha. [The ending] is less a fulfillment than imaginative exhaustion (114-5)

Despite their criticism, Nestor, Meyer, and Mei do attempt to acknowledge Ferndean’s singularity.

It is after the year 2000 that critics begin noticing Ferndean as a space in Jane Eyre worthy of foregrounding. In From Glasstown to Ferndean (2000) and “Ferndean: Charlotte Bronte in the Age of Pteridomania” (2003), authors Sheila G. B. Russell and Yoshiaki Shirai respectively study the manor’s significance in the novel. Recounting Jane’s movement from one house to the other, Russell writes,

Jane’s search for home, while personal, is also a social and cultural endeavor. The child Jane Eyre becomes Jane Rochester, the autobiographer through her experience of
five homes, each of which shapes her, but where she also challenges the values that each home would impose on her (128).

Ferndean, Russell observes, is farthest in disposition from Gateshead where Jane experiences “unnatural exclusiveness” (130); there, Jane finds a “natural seclusion” (130), she adds. Deviating from theories that find relief in Jane’s ability to find home at Ferndean, Russell argues that the house is “far from idyllic” (7) because Jane’s search of home is comparable to Bronte’s search of a space in literary history as a woman writer and an isolated space, such as Ferndean, doesn’t make an ideal ground for such an endeavor (8). Russell identifies Ferndean as just another prison (190). Finding phonetic similarities between the words ‘dean’ and ‘den,’ Russell argues that Ferndean manor, for a creative and independent woman, is “insalubrious” (191). She sees the space only as Bronte’s “compromise between nature and culture” (emphasis added 191). Hence, according to Russell, Ferndean’s place in Jane’s narrative is unique but unhelpful. Shirai, on the other hand, presents a more positive outlook. In her study that traces Bronte’s use of ferns in the novel, Shirai claims that caught by Pteridomania (fern fever), Bronte’s special knowledge of the dual nature of fern plants help readers understand why Jane experiences the various houses in the novel differently. Resurfacing the Victorian fascination of ferns, Shirai presents a remarkable study where she states,

Pteridomania, which began in the late 1830s, became a social phenomenon and continued until the middle of the 1890s. This craze can be construed as a manifestation of the Victorians’ wish to escape from the environmental pollution caused by the Industrial Revolution (125).

According to Shirai, Ferndean, the fern valley, is Bronte’s attempt to house her heroine close to nature, separated from the toils of the polluted, industrial world. Moreover, Shirai
believes that the two images of Rochester, i.e, the stern owner of Thornfield and the soft-natured resident of Ferndean, reflects the two opposing characteristics of fern plants. She explains,

ferns have two contradictory qualities: they may be connected with insalubrity and become an object of hatred because they grow in unhealthy, damp soils, while they may represent primeval energy and become an object of love because they can grow, impervious to the air pollution if only there is sufficient water. Charlotte Bronte […] changed the qualities of ferns in accordance with the change in the situation of the hero and the heroine: from an object of hatred to the one of love (130).

Shirai successfully indicates that Ferndean receives as much attention and care from Bronte as she delivers in the creation of the other homes in the novel. However, neither she nor Russell demystifies how Ferndean suits Jane’s temperament enough to home her restive self for the remaining days of her life. Hence, the branch of Jane Eyre scholarship that investigates the novel’s finale leaves Ferndean’s domiciliary qualities largely under-explored.

I identify Ferndean as a mystery to be resolved. Although Thornfield Hall entertains such reputation in the beginning of Jane Eyre, Bronte liberates Thornfield from all strangeness and wonder by exposing Bertha, a psychologically disturbed woman, as the source of its paranormal disturbances. Ferndean, however, free of any conflict or instability, provides Jane an ideal shelter and atmosphere, thus creating a need for a Bronte scholar to contrast the manor with the other houses in the novel and reveal why Jane, a self-confessed restless being, is happy there.\textsuperscript{8} Such critical venture allows a clear and complete understanding of how Bronte conceptualizes the notion of home. “I often wish to say something about the ‘condition of women’ question […] One can see where the evil lies – but who can point out the remedy?”

\textsuperscript{8} “I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature,” Jane tells her readers in Chapter 12 as she narrates her life at Thornfield as a new governess.
Bronte once wrote in her letter to her publisher, William S. Williams. Although the statement belongs to an 1848 letter, one written to Williams after the publication and success of *Jane Eyre*, it reveals Bronte’s eagerness to write fiction as a commentary on the existing social issues of her time. Subsequently, my critical focus on Ferndean reveals Bronte’s stance on the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. In other words, Bronte presents Ferndean manor as an ideal home where the restive Jane Eyre finds happiness and for that reason, an examination of such an ideal space demonstrates: (a) Bronte’s understanding that a remedy of ‘condition of women’ question begins at (the right) home and (b) Bronte’s belief that the domestic sphere should be free of the paradox: the home is a woman’s private sphere, but a woman can only assume the identity of a generic figure (angel in the house) while inside it. By unremittingly moving Jane from one house to the other and then creating Ferndean as her domicile, I claim that Bronte makes a case for the compatibility between a Victorian woman and her home.

Contextualizing *Jane Eyre*, I assert that Bronte’s engagement with the ‘woman question’ of Victorian mid-century through an inspection of home (space as well as notion) is best understood when interfaced with the fairy bride tales that belong to nineteenth-century English folk tradition. In *Strange and Secret Peoples*, presenting a comprehensive study on how fairy lore infiltrates the culture and literature of the Victorian period, Carole Silver notes,

> Tales of supernatural brides and the ways in which they were interpreted constitute a sociocultural history of Victorian attitudes toward women and marriage.

[These] tales raised questions about female power and sexuality as well as female superiority, equality, or inferiority.

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9 ‘Angel in the house’ as a term comes to literature only in 1854 as Coventry Patmore writes a poem of the same name. The idea that a Victorian home is a woman’s sphere to nurture and decorate, however, pre-dates Patmore’s poem by decades.
Doubtlessly, *Jane Eyre* participates with similar notions regarding woman’s place and position in nineteenth-century English society. Hence, in my observation, recognizing Jane as a character ontologically similar to the fairy bride (particularly the selkie bride) from folklore enhances as well as corroborates the investigation this chapter performs on the relationship between an individualistic Victorian woman and home. Like Jane, the selkie bride is rich in female subjectivity, but is forced to assume an identity that is separate from her real self in a patriarchal space. Hence, like Jane, the selkie bride is always in search of a home. For a selkie bride, home is the sea where she can transform back to her original, animal self. Similarly, I argue that by reading the selkie bride as a companion figure to Jane, one discovers how Ferndean becomes Jane’s home because it is the only house in the novel that gives Jane the freedom to embrace her inner nature: her animality.

To perceive the selkie as a companion figure for Jane in order to elevate reader’s understanding of Jane’s restlessness, movement, and settlement is a novel approach in Bronte criticism. However, criticism that identifies Britain’s fairy tradition as subtext to *Jane Eyre* already exists. As Bronte infuses her novel with fairy tale references, the novel opens inroads for critics to discuss Victorian fairy tales and fairy lore alongside it. However, despite the existence of such approach, questions remain: What does a fairy (or a fairy bride) reading of *Jane Eyre* infer about the heroine’s constant movement from one house to the other? What does Bronte’s incorporation of fairy tale elements in *Jane Eyre* say about her expectations from women in her contemporary society? My study departs from the existing critical venture that invites a fairy tradition reading of *Jane Eyre* because it not only introduces the figure of the selkie to assist a feminist reading of the novel, but also uncovers Bronte’s feminist notions on home and woman’s role in it. According to Reuben Sass, “*Jane Eyre* stands chronologically at the cusp of a revival
of interest in fairies and creatures from traditional folklore” (18). I argue that by participating, albeit subtly, in the conversation started by folklorists and fairy tale writers of England, Bronte grasps an effective literary route to convey her feelings.

An avid reader of Blackwood’s magazine that featured numerous fairy tales by the Scottish author, James Hogg and by Thomas Keightley, the author of *The Fairy Mythology* (1828), Bronte was well familiar with Britain’s fairy tradition. Additionally, in a biographical study on the Bronte sisters, Marie Campbell states how Tabby Aykroyd, the Brontes’ house-help, was a big source of fairy stories in the Bronte household. Campbell writes, “On dark winter evenings, Tabby gathered her motherless charges around her [...] and related thrilling tales of the phantom black dog Guytrash, fairies, and hobgoblins” (85). Hence, to no surprise, Bronte fills *Jane Eyre* with references not only from a multitude of fairy tales, but also from Victorian fairy lore. Not only does Jane assume herself to be a fairy in one scene (the red room scene in *JE*, 18), but Rochester frequently perceives her as one as well. He repeatedly uses words like fairy (*JE* 283), spirit (*JE* 236), changeling (*JE* 315), elf (*JE* 315), sylph (*JE* 300), angel (*JE* 363), and others to describe her. For decades, Rochester’s playful recognitions have encouraged readers to embark upon numerous fairy tale readings of the novel. Naturally, critics have continually displayed fondness for reading Jane Eyre as a fairy heroine herself. Auerbach and Knoepflmacher state that Bronte uses “the potency of the female fairy-tale tradition” (11) in the novel. Gilbert and Gubar associate Jane’s story with the classic fairy tale of Cinderella. According to the writers, Jane’s rag-to-riches journey that begins at a house where she is a slave-like member for her relations to her marriage to Rochester, an established wealthy man, resembles a bildungsroman that is very Cinderella-esque in nature (342). After Gilbert and Gubar

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10 James Hogg wrote under the pen name, Ettrick Shepherd
open the platform for critics to study Jane’s life alongside that of a fairy tale heroine’s, Karen E. Rowe becomes one of the first critics to take this project extensively further. In her work, Rowe recognizes Bronte’s deep familiarity and fondness with Britain’s fairy tale tradition and identifies *Cinderella, Gulliver’s Travels, Sleeping Beauty, Blue Beard, and Beauty and the Beast* as tales that have inspired Bronte to present a unique take upon her heroine. Rowe argues that Bronte finds great appeal in the fairy tale structure and theme to incorporate them in her story, but eventually, as Jane Eyre becomes a character more mature and complicated than one would imagine, the author “renounces [the fairy tale tradition] because it subverts the heroine’s independence and human equality” (70). 

Rowe writes,

“Bronte [only] tests the paradigm of fairy tale for her Bildungsroman and finds it lacking, precisely because it can give shape only to the child bride of Rochester, not to the substantial human being who is Jane Eyre (71).”

Hence, in Rowe’s undertaking, Bronte’s careful use of fairy tale paradigm and her eventual and equally careful rejection of it allow her heroine to sustain her individuality as well as her complex identity in the novel. While Rowe primarily mentions the fairy tales that appear only as intertexts in *Jane Eyre*, more recently, Melissa Dickson speaks extensively about the tale that appears inside the text of the novel – *Arabian Nights*. Dickson suggests that Jane’s copy of *Arabian Nights* can be read as “a representational object in Jane’s life” and investigates the work it performs in “material culture, memory, and the construction of an autobiographical subject” (199). Dickson chiefly sees Jane’s book as an object that “structures [her] memories” (199) in the story. While Jane Eyre successfully stands both as a fairy tale lover and a fairy tale character,

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11 Although I agree with Rowe on her assertion that structurally, Jane’s tale differs from that of a fairy bride’s making Jane only half a fairy bride, I argue that thematically, the tale of the selkie bride is critically significant and meaningful to juxtapose with Jane’s narrative.
Silver claims that she is also, partially, a fairy-bride. More specifically, Silver terms Jane “a fairy-bride manqué” (106). Regardless, Silver successfully moves Jane Eyre scholars’ critical attention from fairy tales to fairy lore.

After Silver’s recognition of Jane as, albeit quasi, fairy bride, Bronte criticism develops a newfound interest in seeing the character’s capacity within the sphere of fairy brides and swan maidens. Abigail Heiniger and Sass, in their separate works, are the two critics who generously and sensibly explore the concept further. Heiniger claims that Bronte displays an interest in both, the fairy tale and the fairy lore of her times and observes Jane Eyre as a character undergoing a journey that is driven largely by fairy tropes. Heiniger reminds us that “fairy is an identity [Jane] assumes; it is not imposed upon her” (28) and claims that the heroine assumes this very identity in “crucial moments in her journey” (27) to show that Bronte “uses the fairy tropes to drive the heroic narrative” (27). On the other hand, directly influenced by Silver’s observation, Sass claims that Jane Eyre’s “spirituality, intellectuality, and sexually liberated [nature]” easily pairs her with the Victorian swan maiden (19). Additionally, Sass explores the three attributes and suggests that his analysis presents “a coherent synthesis of Jane’s character that casts her feminism and spiritual independence in a holistic, unified light” (29). Through such archetype of the swan maiden that carries “deep-rooted cultural associations,” Sass further argues that Jane’s character gains context as well as uniqueness (29). However, despite such detailed analysis of Jane as a fairy being and Sass’s claim that Jane is comparable to a fairy bride, critics haven’t yet

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12 Focusing on structural details of fairy bride tales, Silver claims that since Jane doesn’t marry Rochester before leaving him, it is not completely possible to identify her as a fairy bride; her abandonment happens before she becomes a bride. Silver writes, “[Jane] needed only to have married Edward Rochester before she left him to have been a fullfledged swan maiden” (106). This chapter agrees with Silver on the point that Jane isn’t a fairy bride herself, but argues on the usage of the fairy bride trope differently. That is, in this chapter, I claim that Jane’s character traits, behavior, and her choice of Ferndean as her final home are elements of the novel that are better comprehensible when read alongside the trope.

13 Abigail Heiniger suggests we must differentiate between these two traditions.
explored what Bronte seeks to convey about women’s roles in society by incorporating fairy tale elements in her novel. Additionally, while ‘the return home’ is an unignorably crucial aspect of every fairy bride tale, critics like Sass leave their readings of *Jane Eyre* incomplete by approaching Jane as a fairy bride, but failing to discuss her return to Rochester. Hence, in this chapter, I pay a special attention to Ferndean claiming that while the selkie figure aids our understanding of Jane’s actions and behavior, it also helps us discern Ferndean as the right home for Bronte’s heroine.

Originally a seal from the sea, a selkie can shed her skin while she is on land and transform into a human being upon choice and convenience. According to folklore, on the rocky shores of North Sea, whenever the sun is strong, the grey seals transform into beautiful maidens to bask in the sunshine revealing the transformative powers of selkies. However, a selkie becomes a selkie bride when a man, typically a fisherman, steals her skin as a means of stopping her from getting back to the waters at the end of the day when her flock has returned. Doing so, he persuades her to marry him. By stealing the seal-skin, the man traps the sea creature on land and regardless of the intensity of his adoration toward her as a husband, a selkie bride is never content.\(^\text{14}\) The sea constantly calls her and the selkie bride becomes a restless being, persistently searching for her lost skin. In words of folklorist Nancy Cassell Mcentire,

> [the selkie bride always] keeps her sense of self through sympathetic connection with her sealskin. Even though she is physically separated from it, she maintains a longing for it and for the freedom that it represents. As soon as she discovers it, she wastes no time in returning to the sea (135)

\(^\text{14}\) Selkie folklore lacks exploration of diverse gender relations and restricts the selkie tales to male fishermen stealing the skins of female selkies. Although there are tales about male selkies seducing unhappy, female humans in the shore, the tales mostly function within the male-female dynamic. Hence, a selkie bride’s capturer is always a man.
Hence, upon finding her lost skin, rueful but decided, the selkie always returns home. The figure of the selkie is, therefore, comparable to a woman who carries an undying sense of individuality. At home (the sea), she lives as an animal (seal) and by choice, transforms into a human to interact with the human world. However, when she becomes a selkie bride, she loses autonomy. In the stories of selkies, her autonomy is, therefore, directly connected to her ability to return home.

In *Jane Eyre*, the notion of home appears more in Jane’s thoughts than in her dialogues and a careful observation of Jane’s reflections and introspections demonstrates the importance Jane gives to the idea of home despite never actively discussing it at length with any of the characters in the novel. For instance, even though the orphan Jane has no home to fondly remember, on a snowy evening during her first months at Lowood, she engages in a pathetic fallacy from the point of view of a child who comes from a happy home and family. She states,

[…] it snowed fast, a drift was already forming against the lower panes; putting my ear close to the window, I could distinguish from the gleeful tumult within, the disconsolate moan of the wind outside […] Probably, if I had lately left a good home and kind parents, this would have been the hour when I should most keenly have regretted the separation (87)

Jane’s reflection, although passive, is noteworthy. Similarly, during her return to Thornfield from a short visit to Gateshead, the adult Jane once again, muses about the idea of returning home. She states,

How people feel when they are returning home from an absence, long or short, I did not know: I had never experienced the sensation. I had known what it was to come back to Gateshead when a child after a long walk, to be scolded for looking cold or gloomy; and later, what it was to come back from church to Lowood, to long for a plenteous meal and a good fire,
and to be unable to get either. Neither of these returnings was very pleasant or desirable: no magnet drew me to a given point, increasing in its strength of attraction the nearer I came. The return to Thornfield was yet to be tried.

Jane’s ruminations on the idea of home indicate its significance in her life and even though she never admits to an active search of a domicile, her frequent movement paired with her untiring rejection of homes demonstrate that the heroine will rest only when she finds a home of her own. In addition, Jane’s constant movement from one house to the author, arguably, reveals the presence of an active author who is invested in her character’s journey. Most importantly, the day the ten-year-old Jane learns about the verb ‘to be’ is the same day she sketches a cottage. Perceiving how securely the two activities are linked, Jane imparts the information in a single sentence: “I learned the first two tenses of the verb Etre, and sketched my first cottage (whose walls, by-the-bye, outrivalled in slope those of the leaning tower of Pisa), on the same day” (88). Drifting at the end of a chapter that introduces the kindness of Helen Burns and Miss Temple, this sentence makes one aware of Jane’s supposition that the notion of home is intricately connected with a person’s ontology. Therefore, in the thirty-eight chapters that encapsulate her autobiography, Jane lives in five different houses, which evidently suggests that Jane is in search of a space where she is free to be. Lamonica writes,

15 In “Atmospheric Exceptionalism in Jane Eyre,” Justine Pizzo interprets Jane’s various responses to the changing atmosphere in different moments in the novel and claims that because Charlotte Bronte was fond of atmospheric studies, Jane’s “sensitive physicality and acute cognition in relation to atmosphere allow her to transcend the limits of her first-person point of view and suggest the knowledge of a controlling author” (85). In a similar vein, I argue that because Bronte’s passages often reveal what Virginia Woolf calls an “awkward break” that suggests that the first person narrator has a life of her own outside the text, Jane’s constant movement from one house to the other also suggests that an author exists outside of the text who is concerned with issues regarding women and homes.

16 The English translation of the French word ‘Etre’ is ‘to be’
Jane’s personal development in the novel is traced in terms of her physical movement through five powerfully coded locations [...]. Each place brings new challenges, new opportunities for growth, and, thus, new levels of self-awareness (67).

Agreeing with Lamonica, Laura Tommaso adds that Jane’s development “is articulated through a [...] progression of houses” (84). Since to be at home is, essentially, to be, Jane’s choice of Ferndean as her domicile indicates its significance for any reader who attempts to interpret the actions of Bronte’s heroine.

The heroine’s journey from one house to the other in Jane Eyre demonstrates the novel’s inclusion of a variety of spaces. The narrative involves events that occur in a total of eight houses, five of which receive a detailed attention from the narrator as Jane lives in them. In this chapter, however, in addition to exploring the disposition of the five chief houses in the novel, I explore the spaces located inside them as well. Hence, I argue that each house that homes Jane, in itself, subsumes two distinct kinds of space within it – one that allows Jane to embrace her animality and the other that takes it away from her, forcing her to remain a social being, i.e., the home and the anti-home. At home, Jane feels a sense of liberty because she has two identities at her disposal. That is, upon will, she carries the choice to either behave like (or associate herself with) an animal, or behave in an orderly (humanly) manner, complying with social conventions.

When Jane encounters the anti-home, her animality is censured and sometimes even castigated. In other words, in anti-home, Jane is forced to retain only her social identity and remain submissive, methodical, and rational. Jane’s encounter with the anti-home, I observe, is what

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17 Aside from the five chief houses (Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Marsh End, and Ferndean), Jane Eyre has characters who are deeply affected by the events that occur in the houses that don’t feature in the narrative. For instance, Helen Burns frequently talks about her home in Northumberland where her father lives. The opening chapters hint the presence of Jane’s first home that belongs to her parents from where her uncle brings her to Gateshead. In a letter that Jane’s uncle writes to Mrs. Reed asking for information about Jane’s whereabouts, the narrative also suggests the presence of John Eyre’s house – a property that Jane later inherits.
triggers her movement from her then-current house. Therefore, in every house that she lives in, it is the home that hosts her as the anti-home pushes her to repel it and move away. The life story of a selkie-bride elucidates this theory further.

For a selkie, the sea is her home and when at home, she is a seal (an animal). While at sea, the selkie has a choice between remaining an animal to stay in the waters and transforming into a human to relish the sun. When a female selkie decides to take a human form, she takes her seal-skin off and visits the shore. “The water’s edge […] can be the setting for extraordinary experiences” (120), says Mcentire. Truly so, in every selkie story, a fisherman “who frequent[s] such locations […] manages to locate the sealskin and take possession of it” (Mcentire 20). She further describes how in that situation, the selkie becomes the fisherman’s property who has to stay with him (121). In selkie narratives, the fisherman who steals the selkie-skin marries her and as he takes her to his house, the selkie encounters a space that restricts her from being herself, i.e, the anti-home. From her autonomous self, losing her animality, the selkie is forced to remain in only one form of existence. The anti-home teases her by allowing her to remember and miss the sea, but without her skin, the selkie bride is unable to return. Being trapped in a space she isn’t allowed to assume her fundamental identity, the selkie bride, in every selkie tale, is an extremely restless being. In Jane Eyre, evidencing a restlessness similar to one projected by the selkie bride of folk stories, Jane states, “I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes” (129). She relates such feelings to her readers during her initial stay at Thornfield.

By creating a Victorian heroine like Jane who seeks a separate and more private space for herself and constantly relocates herself in search of it, Bronte introduces a new understanding of home through Jane Eyre. My observation, therefore, agrees with Russell’s claim that being in
search of home, Bronte, as a woman writer, is in fact in search of a place in literary history.

Taking Russell’s claim a step further, I argue that eighty-two years before Virginia Woolf writes *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Bronte demonstrates that for a woman to live an autonomous life, she must have a home of her own. Woolf claims that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf 4). In that vein, Bronte seems to suggest that for a Victorian woman like Jane, to simultaneously undertake societal expectations and yet maintain an artistic and individualistic hold in life, something that the Victorian culture restricted, she needs a home of her own. In that home, she not only has the ability, but also the choice to live as an artist, a professional, a wife, a mother, and even a madwoman. For Bronte, womanhood entails familial bliss, individual empowerment, as well as liberty to participate with nature. By writing, in words of Kathleen Tillotson, “a novel of the inner life [that] maps a private world” (Tillotson 257), Bronte demonstrates that with such liberty, a woman can not only exercise her creative faculty and communicate with nature, but also detach and re-attach herself – upon will – from the everyday life of things within the sphere she is primarily supposed to find herself in.

The nineteenth-century British society divided the Victorian space into the private and the public, creating a social ideology based on two spheres. The ideology, or doctrine, of the separate spheres that therefore dominated the Victorian perception of gender roles believed that women are associated with the domestic world and men essentially belong to the market or the trade world. That is, women belong to the inner and private sphere of the society (the home) and men control the public one. Hence, for a Victorian mindset, a woman’s home is – in many ways – the woman herself; they are two entities perpetually attached to each other, always reflecting one another. John Ruskin explains the collective mentality on the cohesion of a woman and her home during his lectures in Manchester in 1864. He says,
The stars only may be over her head; the glowworm in the night cold grass may be the only fire at her foot: but home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her […]

That is, instead of being the rigid, material, tangible dwelling place from where a person can physically enter or exit, home is an aura created by an ideal, angelic woman by endowing any space around her with her values and virtues. In *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin further characterizes home as “a sacred place” (44) as the world outside it is full of “terror, doubt, and division” (44). From such explanations, what comes forth is the idea that the domestic sphere is primarily the woman’s sphere. However, here lies a contradiction.

The paradox of the domestic sphere points out that even though society confirms the domestic space (the home) as a woman’s space, while inside it, the woman is not allowed to be who she essentially is. Even when she is inside *her* sphere, she must be what others expect of her. The home, then, exists not as an exclusively individual space for her, but exists only in relation to the outside world and temperament, making it not a ‘home,’ but a space that is merely ‘not-outside.’ In that regard, the angel in the house is only a generic figure. She is everything (a daughter, wife, mother), but her original self. (If we know and can define what the angel in the house is, but don’t know what she wants, we don’t know her at all). However, within this

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18 The way Victorians viewed the separate spheres was arguably different from what Jurgen Habermas expresses in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) about the concept in the eighteenth century. Erika Rappaport reminds us that Habermas “understood the public as a realm that emerged in the eighteenth century, in the ‘world of letters’ – in the press, the coffeehouse, clubs, discussion societies and salons” (78). She further explains, “Habermas wrote of the public as the space between the private world of the economy and the home and the public world of the state” (78)

19 In a letter to G. H. Lewes on January 1848, Bronte describes her inability to understand why Lewes is in awe of Jane Austen and complains that in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen has created a “common-place face” in its heroine. Perhaps by creating Jane Eyre, a heroine who shares her deepest thoughts with her readers, Bronte demonstrates her belief that if one writes about a character, he or she should have a singular personality that is available to the readers rather than someone generic. Further exploration is needed on the difference between Bronte’s Jane Eyre and Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet in terms of heroines assuming or rejecting a “common-place face”
complexity of the domestic sphere, Bronte creates a heroine who repetitively rejects the identities society imposes on her. Hence, one witnesses that through *Jane Eyre*, Bronte effectually questions the paradox. The theory of *home* and *anti-home* explains Bronte’s perception of what a comfortable space for a Victorian woman really looks like. She demonstrates that a home is a sphere that allows a woman to be what she wants – the social self or the private self. Bronte strongly implies that for a woman to have the ability to choose how she wants to live inside her sphere is significant.

By introducing the significance as well as the necessity of choice in a Victorian woman’s life when it comes to choosing and living in the right home, Bronte not only confronts the nineteenth-century cultural understanding of domestic sphere, but also comments on the literary practice of demonizing or condemning characters who carry a great deal of individuality in them. In *How Novels Think*, Nancy Armstrong explains this practice and states,

> Victorian novels make the turn against expressive individualism a mandatory component of the subject’s growth and development. To create an individual, however, still requires the novel to offer an interiority in excess of the social position that individual is supposed to occupy. […] Accordingly, signs of excess have to be disciplined, that is, observed, contained, sublimated, and redirected toward a socially acceptable goal. To become an individual under these circumstances, the subject must still surmount the limits of an assigned social position. This is only the first step on the path to individuality, however, and a false step at that (8).

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20 However, it is important to note that even though my argument doesn’t discuss the figure of the fallen woman, according to the theory of *home* and *anti-home*, the fallen woman as a liminal figure. She is neither at home (where she has the choice to be herself or her social self) and nor in anti-home (where she is forced to be a socially viable character). The fallen woman is in the public space whereas the anti-home is still a part of the house a Victorian woman lives in.
Critics like Gayatri Spivak and Armstrong criticize Bronte for her treatment of Bertha Mason’s character as they see Bertha as a scapegoat who exists only so that Jane can distinguish herself from Bertha’s monstrosity and gain Rochester’s admiration. To elucidate, Armstrong notes that typically, in Victorian literature, monstrous figures like Bertha who imperil perceptions of femininity through aggression help the Victorian heroine “restore and perpetuate the domestic culture threatened by her unruly counterpart” (80). Similarly, reading Bertha as a “figure produced by the axiomatics of imperialism” (251), Spivak points out,

In [Bronte’s] fictive England, [Bertha] must play out her role, act out the transformation of her ‘self’ into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction (251).

However, in my understanding, when *Jane Eyre* is studied as a text that deliberates on issues concerning women’s place, power, and position in the domestic sphere, Bertha appears in the novel not as a consequence, but a warning. In other words, Bertha demonstrates the condition when female individual energy fails to escape the confines of the *anti-home*. In contrast, Bronte creates an active, versatile, and mobile heroine, Jane, who changes her abode every time she confronts the *anti-home*.

Russell notices how each home that houses Jane in the novel “both nurtures and threatens her” (128). Indeed, Jane continually seeks to balance her private desires with social responsibilities regardless of the house she is currently in because each present to her both *home* and *anti-home*. In the opening scene, Jane finds herself sitting by the window, covered and hidden by a curtain. In the window-seat that is her *home*, Jane becomes more than a human; figuratively, she is also an animal. In that scene, Jane’s readers discover that the ten-year-old orphan would rather feel a universe of emotions sitting with a book by the window than take a
walk. Detached from the world by having a curtain drawn close, she rejoices in her “shrined double retirement” (39) – her solitude. Jane immerses herself in *Bewick’s History of British Birds* as it allows her imagination to take flight. She becomes a bird. Kathleen Anderson and Heather R. Lawrence write, “[the] avian imagery [presents] a paradigm of power” (241) in the scene. Truly so, being *home*, Jane triumphs in her power of imagination. “Each picture told a story,” she states and visits “the coast of Norway […] the Northern Ocean […] melancholy isles [and] the stormy Hebrides” (10). All this time, her human self remains silently by the window. “With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy,” she writes, “happy at least in my way. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon” (11). The interruption arrives in the shape of the brutish John Reed, Jane’s abusive elder cousin who begins taunting her. “Accustomed to John Reed’s abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure […]” (12) she shares with her readers. When Reed severely strikes her using the same book she had been reading, “my terror […] passed its climax; other feelings succeeded” (13), Jane confesses, and to him, exclaims, “Wicked and cruel boy! […] You are like a murderer” (13). Anderson and Lawrence state that through such confrontation, Jane “uncages her passionate voice” (emphasis added 243). Reed, calling her outburst “a picture of passion” (13), has her dragged to a cold, dark chamber in the manor. This chamber, the red room, is Jane’s *anti-home* at Gateshead. John Reed’s interruption is not only annoying, but extremely violent because he turns Jane’s book, her metaphorical wings, to something, in Sharon Marcus’s words, “catastrophically material” (209). Before locating her in the room, John calls Jane “a bad animal” (11), and after finding her, striking her severely, and witnessing her resistance, he exclaims that she is like “a mad cat” (15).

21 Intriguingly, folklore relates that selkies are mythical creatures that are believed to be found around the shores of Northern Ocean – the same locations Jane reads about in *Bewick’s*. Such locations as the home to selkie folklore are discussed in detail by Patricia Monaghan in *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*. 
Evidently, when Jane is her true, rebellious self, John sees her as animalistic. Anderson and Lawrence discuss John’s perception of Jane’s “potent self-assertion” (241) in that scene and claim how her retaliation, like her relaxation, becomes bird-like. They state,

Jane acts on the fight-or-flight impulse, transforming herself into the powerful, ‘frantic’ predatory bird who becomes John’s ‘Master’ while he becomes her helpless prey, dependent on his minion sisters to fly to bring his mother bird to his protection. His mistaking Jane for a ‘Rat’ instead of a bird forwards her ability to surprise him with her hidden carrion strength (242).

Hence, when Jane is at home, she is happy and powerful as she is both human and bird-like. John, the personification of Gateshead’s anti-home, reprimands it avidly. As punishment, he calls his mother, Jane’s Aunt Reed, and they order that she be sent to the red room.

Jane abhors the red room. Her adult self, the novel’s narrator, states that the room “gave [her] nerves a shock, of which [she] feel[s] the reverberation to this day” (25). She describes,

The red-room was a square chamber […] one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. […] Mr. Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this chamber he breathed his last; here he lay in state; hence his coffin was borne by the undertaker’s men; and, since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion (17)

Being locked inside what Gilbert and Gubar call “the patriarchal death chamber” (340) as red room is the same place where Jane’s uncle died, Jane feels the space getting “colder and darker” (18). As she happens upon the looking-glass, Jane looks at herself, and intriguingly sees a different figure. Perceiving her image to have belonged to something supernatural, she says,
the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp (18)

I read this onlooking as Jane’s attempt to imagine herself as a being separate from the vulnerable human that she is inside the red room. By trying to find a different, more animalistic reflection in the mirror, Jane attempts to escape through transformation. Only then, unsuccessful, does she scream out a “dreadful noise” (JE 21) that allows Gilbert and Gubar to perceive Jane’s hysterical outcry as an attempt to “escape [the imprisonment] through madness” (340). However, the red room, Gateshead’s anti-home, is strong and cruel. It restricts Jane to be anything more than her social self: an orphan locked in a dreadful room as punishment for reading and showcasing passion. When Jane attempts to assume another identity in the mirror, she is only “half” of what she wants to be. While the home by the window allows her to take upon two identities, the red room doesn’t even allow half of any. Ultimately, claiming to have been “oppressed [and] suffocated” (21), Jane faints.

The red room becomes the anti-home for Jane just as Thornfield’s third story becomes one for Bertha. While John Reed, the patriarchal authority, causes Jane’s imprisonment, Rochester, Bertha’s husband, causes hers. Both women find comfort and support in their caretakers, Bessie and Grace Poole respectively. However, despite creating such similar settings, Bronte contrasts prisoner Jane from prisoner Bertha. Jane, unlike Bertha, exercising reason, becomes aware of the insalubrity of the anti-home and actively turns her abhorrence toward it into something constructive. She outpours her anger unto Mrs. Reed. In other words, the episode in the red room becomes one of the primary factors that motivates as well as causes Jane’s departure from Gateshead as Jane turns her anger into action. Having suffered what the narrator
considers a “frightful episode” (84) inside the red room, she takes the first opportunity she gets to, in words of Marcus, “cr[y] out to her repressive Aunt Reed” (209). Jane passionately complains,

I shall remember how you thrust me back—roughly and violently thrust me back—into the red-room, and locked me up there, to my dying day; though I was in agony; though I cried out, while suffocating with distress, ‘Have mercy! Have mercy, Aunt Reed!’ And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me—knocked me down for nothing (44).

Russell notes that through her outburst, Jane demonstrates her unwillingness to live by the standards set by the Reeds. “[Jane] will not be compliant and agreeable with the Reeds, even when Bessie tells her” (138), she states. Evidently, Bronte’s creation of Bertha seems to be her attempt at discouraging repression and submissiveness in Victorian women.

Regrettably, criticism mistakes Jane for being the one with greater inhibitions than Bertha. Jane is often misconstrued as a quiet figure in literature. This is because during her childhood, as Jane gradually realizes that her silence and submission are less cruelly received (by people of authority) than her verbal declarations of emotions, she decides on the precept: *one must exercise restraint.*

Rowe claims that “the red room functions […] as a symbolic restraint on the heroine’s passions” (73) and Marcus adds, “in those opening chapters, [Jane] experiences attacks on her body that stem from her verbal outbursts […] her resistance leads only to more violent punishment” (209). Evidently, after the episode in the red room followed by her unsuccessful launch of emotions to Mrs. Reed, Jane recoils and moderates her speech, appearing as a quiet and restrained figure in literature. On one hand, feminist critics lament Jane’s

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22 The precept is implied and not directly stated in the novel
submissive nature because freedom and ability of expression characterize an independent mind like hers. On the other hand, critics also marvel at the pleasant peculiarity of the heroine’s character: as a story-teller, she is expressive with a voice that “moves unmediated” (29) says Janet H. Freeman, but as a character, Jane is the very opposite. Above all, critics recognize the social necessity Bronte felt to abstain from infusing too much visible passion into her heroine. Regretting such necessity and Bronte’s seeming compliance of cultural expectations regarding women authors, Woolf complains that she “write[s] of herself when she should write of her characters” (Woolf). Similarly, Nina Auerbach and U. C. Knoepflmacher notice the “decided disadvantage” of female Victorian authors like Bronte who were “expected by their culture to adhere to and propagate the realism of everyday” (12). They write, “eager to be valued for their social realism, [Victorian women writers] found themselves prevented from overtly acknowledging the importance of their own creative efforts” (12). Hence, critics read Jane’s restraint as Bronte’s fear of allowing her heroine to be too differentiated. Sympathizing with Bronte’s stance, Gilbert and Gubar write, “what horrified the Victorians was Jane’s anger” (338) as, for a Victorian audience, the anger is comparable to her sexuality, and a Victorian woman’s sexuality – at all times – must remain concealed to a point that it seems non-existent. Finally, Armstrong explains the Victorian attitude toward passionate heroines and how some authors refrained from creating such a character. She writes,

The Victorian novel not only portrayed all women who expressed extreme forms of individualism as extremely unattractive but also punished them so harshly as to persuade a readership that the very excesses that once led to self-fulfillment and the illusion of a more

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23 Intriguingly, in a letter to G. H. Lewes in 1849, Bronte writes, “I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on these terms or with such ideas, that I ever took pen in hand”

24 Auerbach and Knoepflmacher echo Elaine Showalter’s observation that Victorian female novelists have often had to be “self-conscious” (4).
flexible social order now yielded exactly the opposite results. Rather than acting out excesses that would qualify her to tell the story of how she became an individual, a woman was much better off internalizing those excesses, as Jane Eyre does (Armstrong 79)

Hence, in criticism, sometimes regretfully and sometimes understandably, Jane Eyre is renowned to be ingenious with words and thoughts as a narrator, but equally lacking in their expression as a character. Even though Jane reveals a “frantic rebelliousness” (Mei 106) and an “empowered female voice” (Bennett 300) by communicating with her readers directly and exclusively, as a character, she remains, in Gilbert and Gubar’s words, “demure [as one of] Bronte’s women artists [who] withdraw behind their art even while they assert themselves through it” (82). Mei even calls Jane ascetic (106). Here, I feel, lies a communication gap between Bronte and her critics.

Critics have long been limiting Jane Eyre’s expression to her authorship and narration, overlooking how, as a character, she is as much discernibly expressive. While it is true that after Gateshead and her early days in Lowood she doesn’t speak about her thoughts as often as she shares it with her readers, it is also evident how she replaces her quietness with something visible and impactful. If one were to re-read Jane Eyre with the sole intention of tracing what Jane does during an urgency to express, one would notice that during such moments, she takes long walks, that is, she marks a physical journey away from the house she is living in. The very first line of the novel says, “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day” and very soon, Jane admits,

I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.
Caught in the narrator’s task of introducing the scene, however, Jane leaves her thought incomplete. She never explains her dislike for walks after stating that on that very day, there was no possibility of taking one. Robert L. Patten asks, “How can a novel begin with “no possibility?” Why is not being able to take a walk worthy of remark?” (148). This incomplete remark, however, is not one of Bronte’s “awkward break[s]” (69) as Woolf would term it, but something absolute and deliberate. Clearly, Bronte intends to introduce her heroine by keeping her at a liminal space between “possibility” and “no possibility” – a feature of the home and a feature of the anti-home respectively. In addition, Bronte also sets an irony: a heroine who begins her story with such a comment only finds herself continually walking through the rest of the novel. Patten fittingly answers his own question, saying, Jane’s remark implies that the novel is “about places, spaces, and the possibility of moving toward, away from, and within them physically or mentally” (148). Bronte makes it apparent that whenever strong emotions take hold of her heroine, she channels them by actively changing her abode. In other words, as long as Jane finds a corner or an atmosphere of home in her dwelling place, she stays, but as soon as she encounters the anti-home, she actively moves away from the house altogether. This is something not only Bertha, but Helen Burns fails to do as well.

After Gateshead, Jane reaches Lowood where she meets Helen Burns, Bertha’s inverse. While criticism commonly identifies Jane as Bertha’s opposite, I contend that in order to demonstrate the devious nature of the anti-home, Bronte pairs Helen as a figure opposite to Bertha to showcase the two extremes the anti-home can push women to. Gilbert and Gubar write,

25 Clara Mucci writes, the window-seat is Jane’s “first clearly liminal site” (51). For this argument, I claim that it is the beginning that places the heroine in a liminal space, but the window-seat is clearly the home and not a space between home and anti-home.
On a figurative and psychological level it seems suspiciously clear that the specter of Bertha is still another [...] avatar of Jane. What Bertha now does, for instance, is what Jane wants to do. [...] Bertha, in other words, is Jane’s truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead.

On the contrary, I argue that by escaping the anti-home, it is Jane who does what Bertha wants to do. While Bertha is on one extreme end of an individualistic female trapped in a patriarchal cell, Helen remains at the other. While Bertha carries excessive individuality (Armstrong 42), Helen carries a deficit amount. It is evident that Helen is caught in Lowood’s anti-home because her conversations with Jane frequently suggests that she is thinking of, and therefore missing, her home. For instance, speaking about her state of mind inside the classroom, Helen shares her inability to pay attention to Miss Miller’s lectures. She says,

[O]ften I lose the very sound of her voice; I fall into a sort of dream. Sometimes I think I am in Northumberland, and that the noises I hear round me are the bubbling of a little brook which runs through Deepden, near our house;—then, when it comes to my turn to reply, I have to be awakened; and having heard nothing of what was read for listening to the visionary brook, I have no answer ready (89)

Helen makes no effort to follow the rules of her institution and neither does she make any to escape them. “I make no effort; I follow as inclination guides me” (87), she tells Jane. Very soon, Helen catches consumption disease and dies at the age of eleven, never getting a chance to visit home. The night before her demise, she tells Jane that heaven is her “long home – [her] last home” (112). Helen asks Jane to believe that happiness is found in the region of God. Bronte,

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26 According to Gilbert and Gubar, Helen displays “the impossible ideal [of] self-renunciation” (346).
however, disallows her heroine to believe in inaction and self-sacrifice. As a result, Jane questions Helen’s beliefs lying beside her on her friend’s deathbed. “Again I questioned, but this time only in thought. ‘Where is that region? Does it exist?’” (113), Jane doubts.

While Helen finds herself buried deep within Lowood’s anti-home, her friendship comforts Jane to an extent that while with Helen, Jane experiences being home.27 This happens primarily because Helen accepts Jane’s nature that although isn’t completely animalistic, is still non-human and therefore, otherworldly. While John Reed rebukes Jane for displaying her passions at Gateshead, calling out on her animality, Mr. Brocklehurst repeats such criticism in Lowood. Accusing Jane of being a liar, Brocklehurst places her on a stool in the middle of her classroom and at the center of a spiteful speech. During his chastisement, he announces,

> My dear children […] it becomes my duty to warn you, that this girl, who might be one of God’s own lambs, is a little castaway: not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse

While Brocklehurst disgraces Jane as an ‘interloper,’ Helen celebrates an existence of another world with her:

> Hush, Jane! you think too much of the love of human beings; […] Besides this earth, and besides the race of men, there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits:

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27 In The Letters of Charlotte Bronte, Margaret Smith notes that Bronte creates Helen in the memory of her elder sister Maria who caught tuberculosis at the Clergy Daughter’s School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire in 1825. Smith writes, “Her eldest sister Maria was born in 1813, and was to become the serious, quiet, patient child whom Charlotte portrayed as Helen burns in Jane Eyre” (1). Therefore, the link between Maria and Helen makes it even more plausible why Bronte ascribes Helen with qualities of home.
that world is round us, for it is everywhere; and those spirits watch us, for they are commissioned to guard us (Bronte 83)

These words, along with Helen’s acknowledgement that Jane is more than a social being, like girls are supposed to be, appease Jane. “Helen had calmed me” (83), she says. Soon after, when Jane loses Helen to an early death, she passes the “eight years [at Lowood] almost in silence” (99). Jane speaks about finding Lowood only “to some degree a home” (100) because of the presence of Miss Temple, Jane’s compassionate teacher. She states, “her [Miss Temple’s] friendship and society had been my continual solace; she had stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and, latterly, companion” (100). The anti-home at Lowood appears most strongly when Miss Temple departs, leaving Jane completely alone. Sharing a condition similar to the one she experiences in the red room, Jane begins her second attempt at escaping an anti-home:

I felt that it was not enough; I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: “Then,” I cried, half desperate, “grant me at least a new servitude!” (102)

Just like the anti-home of Gateshead compels Jane to move to Lowood, the anti-home at Lowood impels her to seek a new shelter. “She [becomes] a divided self, a restless soul” (147) states Russell, observing Jane’s inability to contain herself at Lowood. Consequently, just as Jane attempts to see herself as another (non-human) being in the mirror inside the red room, while at Lowood, she likewise attempts to embrace her “natural element” (JE 101). Before escaping through madness, she once again tries to escape through animality. However, like the last time, the anti-home overpowers her and “the stirring of old emotions” captivates her. Once again, her
escape becomes unsuccessful. The anti-home, like the red-room, prohibits her ‘natural element.’ “What do I want?” she exclaims and then answers herself, “A new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances” (102).

Jane’s urge to move away from the anti-home is comparable, and thus understandable, by the selkie bride’s life in her human home. Elaborating on the condition faced by fairy brides following their move from the original home to their captor’s house, Silver writes, “Deprived of her own magic realm, she [is] obliged to lead a different and less glorious existence in the world of mortals” (Silver 90). In words of Mcentire, the fairy bride has no choice but to become “accustomed to human ways” (129). However, for a selkie bride, the restlessness and the search for the seal skin – her original identity – never ends. Likewise, when Jane reaches Thornfield Hall by seeking employment in it as a governess, she begins to accustom herself with the way of the world. However, her restlessness persists and noticeably grows. Despite finding comfort in the company of the “placid tempered, kind-natured” Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, and Adele, the pupil she adores, Jane struggles to contain herself in one place. She shares,

Anybody may blame me who likes […] when I took a walk by myself in the grounds; when I went down to the gates and looked through them along the road; or when, while Adèle played with her nurse, and Mrs. Fairfax made jellies in the storeroom, I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen—that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind […] (129).²⁸

²⁸ In September 1843, Charlotte Bronte writes to Emily Bronte detailing on her day’s activities that parallels how she writes about Jane and her tours, especially in this passage. Bronte writes, “I go out and traverse the Boulevards
Like a selkie bride getting accustomed to her new domestic life and yet seeking liberty out in the nature, Jane displays a longing toward the unknown exterior of Thornfield. Discussing similar uncontainable nature of the fairy bride, Silver notes,

> [E]ven in captivity, she [strives] to keep her separateness and power. […] in general, she [is] a tractable wife, often excelling in the menial domestic tasks in which she spen[ds] her days (90)

Similarly, Jane assumes the social role of a guest at Thornfield and her professional role of the governess compliantly. Comfortable at Thornfield, as Mary Poovey observes, Jane even “marginalizes the work” (44) of the governess for her readers. “[K]eep[ing] her separateness,” she continues to associate herself with nature, a space that provides the atmosphere of a home at Thornfield. Justine Pizzo, in an inclusive study of Jane Eyre’s communication with nature, states that in the opening scene of the novel, she “focuses on two complementary and stimulating atmospheres: a sensory one […] and a literary one” (84). I claim that after finding home amidst them, Jane continues to situate herself in the sensory atmosphere even when her abode changes. Jane says,

> Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third storey, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind’s eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing; 29

and streets of Bruxelles sometimes for hours together. Yesterday, I went on a pilgrimage to the cemetery, and far beyond it on to a hill where there was nothing but fields as far as the horizon. When I came back it was evening, but I had such a repugnance to return to the house, which contained nothing that I cared for (329)

29 According to Marcus, it is at such moments of oneness with nature that the authorial self takes prominence. She writes, “Jane’s status as an author emerges most distinctively in moments of mental abstraction and physical self-alienation” (207). Pizzo stands in support of Marcus’s observation and adds, Jane’s “acute cognition in relation to the atmosphere allow her to transcend the limits of her first-person point of view and suggest the knowledge of a controlling author”
While Jane displays an account of her restlessness by demonstrating her impulse of movement, she finds people and places in the manor that allows her to remain in her being. At “a mile from Thornfield” (131), one evening, Jane returns to her element. She walks by a lane that grows wild roses and rejoices in the solitary atmosphere. She describes,

If a breath of air stirred, it made no sound here; for there was not a holly, not an evergreen to rustle, and the stripped hawthorn and hazel bushes were as still as the white, worn stones which causewayed the middle of the path. Far and wide, on each side, there were only fields, where no cattle now browsed; and the little brown birds, which stirred occasionally in the hedge, looked like single russet leaves that had forgotten to drop (131)

Readily immersed in her natural self and away from the human world, she ascribes a supernatural identity to the first form of movement she encounters. That is, when she sees a man on a horse, who Jane later discovers is her employer, Edward Rochester, she tells the readers that she witnesses “a North-of-England spirit called a ‘Gytrash’” (132). At home in those parts of Thornfield’s grounds, Jane not only assumes her animalistic, otherworldly self, but imposes it upon her surrounding as well. Instead of seeing a Victorian, domesticated horse, she sees a “lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head” (132). However, as soon as Rochester fully enters the scene, Jane’s private self escapes her and she begins seeing the world as it is again. She states,

The man, the human being, broke the spell at once. Nothing ever rode the Gytrash: it was always alone […] No Gytrash was this,—only a traveller taking the short cut to Millcote (133)
Gradually, while at Thornfield, Rochester becomes a figure similar to Helen because like her, he too recognizes as well as acknowledges Jane’s otherworldliness. After their first, rough encounter in the forest, Rochester invites Jane for a more formal meeting that winter evening in his living room. Soon after she enters, he overlays the meeting with questions. Rochester enquires about her relations and previous abode. “Who are your parents?” he asks and “I have none,” replies the orphan Jane. “[Y]ou must have some sort of kinsfolk […]?” he asks again, to which Jane says, “[…] none that I ever saw.” “And your home?” Mr. Rochester impatiently continues, but boldly comes the answer, “I have none” (144). When Mrs. Fairfax, nervous about her employer’s first impression of the governess she has grown to like, interferes, Rochester retorts, “[d]on’t trouble yourself to give her a character” (144). Like Helen, Rochester gives her a separate non-human character:

so you were waiting for your people when you sat on that stile? [...] For the men in green: it was a proper moonlight evening for them. Did I break through one of your rings, that you spread that damned ice on the causeway? (144)

With this question, Rochester mocks Jane with the implication that she is, if not a human, a witch. However, instead of castigating her otherness like John Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester makes additional effort to construe her. Following such intention, he asks Jane to share her creative work (her mind’s work) with him. Receiving an opportunity to share her paintings with her employer on their very first meeting, Jane recognizes the atmosphere around Rochester as a safe one and home-like. Intrigued, she asks Mrs. Fairfax about his background later that evening. Upon the housekeeper’s insufficient narration, Jane shares with her readers that she “should have liked something clearer […] more explicit information of the origin and nature of Mr. Rochester’s trials” (159). Sympathizing with her employer, Jane begins accepting
Thornfield as home. Her moments in the manor begin the “new path toward psychic wholeness” (30) that Tita French Baumlin and James S. Baumlin claim Jane achieves with Rochester toward the end of the novel. When she leaves for Gateshead for a week to tend to her dying Aunt Reed, Jane misses Thornfield. In her walk back to the manor, Jane encounters Rochester who gleefully asks, “And this is Jane Eyre? […] What the deuce have you done with yourself this last month?” When Jane plainly replies, “I have been with my aunt, sir, who is dead” (282), Rochester catches the humor of the statement structure and immediately grants her another supernatural identity, saying,

A true Janian reply! Good angels by my guard! She comes from the other world – from the abode of people who are dead; and tells me so when she meets me alone here in the gloaming! If I dared, I’d touch you, to see if you are substance or shadow, you elf! (282)

Jane notices Rochester’s playful and harmless mockery and feeds on his cognition to feel more comfortable around him. As a result, momentarily, Jane articulates,

Thank you, Mr. Rochester, for your great kindness. I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home—my only home (emphasis added, 283)

Unfortunately, Thornfield, despite its promises, reveals its secret anti-home to Jane very soon.

Thornfield’s anti-home lies in its third-story with Bertha. On Jane and Rochester’s wedding day, Richard Mason, the brother of Rochester’s “mad” (JE 320) first-wife, exposes his sister’s existence. Unable to proceed with the wedding rituals, Rochester becomes compelled to introduce Bertha to Jane and their wedding party. Furious over the sudden turn of events, he
rushes to Thornfield’s third story with his company and enters Bertha’s chamber. During Jane’s first glance at Bertha, before she perceives the being in front of her as a human, Jane sees an animal. “[T]he clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet” (338), she describes to her readers. Moreover, Bertha’s first action, too, becomes animalistic for Jane: “the lunatic sprang and grappled [Rochester’s] throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled” (339). Intriguingly, Jane acknowledges Bertha in a carefully conducted series of identities. First, she sees the animal (hyena), second, she sees the human (woman), and only third, she sees the social being (wife). That is, after describing her animalism, Jane continues, “[s]he was a big woman in stature almost equaling her husband” (338). Jane, who this chapter claims to be essentially an animal spirit caught in the human body, like a selkie, offers to look at the other woman the same way. In fact, even before the knowledge of Bertha’s existence, Jane ascribes her misdoings to be the doings of an animal. For instance, after witnessing a mysterious fire and later tending to the bleeding Mr. Mason, Jane reflects,

[W]hat mystery, that broke out now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman’s face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey? (243)

After her meeting with Bertha, Jane remains “too calm” (JE 340) to weep or mourn. Arguably, after encountering her, it is not Bertha who frightens Jane, but the aspect of Rochester not being able to acknowledge a woman’s animal nature that scares her the most. While talking about his fate as Bertha’s husband, Rochester says,
You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge
whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at
least human (337)

At this moment, it is as though Jane realizes that no matter how much attention Rochester
gives to the possibility that Jane is otherworldly, his view and treatment of Bertha evidences his
inability to allow a woman to retain anything more than a social and human identity. Noticing his
ill perception of Bertha’s nature, Jane complains, “[Y]ou are inexorable for that unfortunate lady:
you speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel—she cannot help being mad”
(336). Sympathizing with Bertha, Jane displays an understanding of her animalistic nature rather
than Rochester’s human reflections. When Rochester denies Jane’s allegation that he is
inconsiderate of a person’s involuntary state of being, he states, “you misjudge me again: it is not
because she is mad I hate her” and asks, “If you were mad, do you think I should hate you”
(338). To his surprise, Jane answers, “I do indeed, sir” (338). Hence, as Rochester, her “true
home,” demonstrates that he is incapable of hosting Jane’s animality because he mistreats and
misapprehends Bertha’s animality, he – as well as Thornfield – becomes an absolute *anti-home*.
As a result, doing what she always does when confronting one, Jane decides to leave once again.
“Mr. Rochester, I must leave you […] I must leave Adèle and Thornfield. I must part with you
for my whole life: I must begin a new existence among strange faces and strange scenes” (339),
she painfully, yet decidedly, states.

Jane Eyre “decidedly, instantly, entirely” (341) leaves her *anti-home* at Thornfield
and looks for a new shelter. Baumlin and Baumlin state that Jane’s “perilous journey [is one]
toward individuation” (17) at this point. Truly so, Jane travels to find a house that gives her
*home*. Performing a philological reading of the name, ‘Eyre,’ Baumlin and Baumlin demonstrate
that the word, “though no longer current” originates from the Latin word, ‘iterare,’ which translates to ‘to journey’ in modern day English language (17). Hence, according to the critics, Jane journeys “her female ego toward its own nest of Self” (18). Intriguingly, the authors place Jane’s story alongside Ann Belford Ulanov’s theory on the stages of woman’s animus development. They write,

Just as the individual matures physically, cognitively, and emotionally through distinctive developmental stages, so a woman typically experiences four stages of animus development, according to Ulanov (18)

By performing a “neo-Jungian or Jungian-feminist” (16) analysis of *Jane Eyre*, Baumlin and Baumlin claim that in her life, Jane comes in “contact, and often conflict, with the archetypes of her unconscious” (15). The writers suggest that Jane journeys “toward a conscious ego-Self relation – […] the animus, the masculine ‘other’ within” (17). Therefore, similar to my observation that Jane, in essence, like a selkie, is two beings in one body, through the Jungian concept of anima and animus, Baumin and Baumlin claim that Jane is a combination of the conscious feminine and the unconscious masculine (animus). The writers, thus, strengthen the idea proposed in this chapter that Bronte encourages a life where while at home, the woman has a choice from two identities. According to Mary Ann Davis, Jane’s movement from Thornfield is a “woman’s individual quest for self-fulfillment within a patriarchal society that operates in an over-simplified dynamic of dominance and submission” (143). Truly so, “searching something — a resource, or at least an informant” (*JE* 376), Jane spends her days between Thornfield and Marsh End attempting to adjust her identity of a vagabond and, yet, remain a social being.

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30 Borrowing Ulanov’s four stages of development, the writers study how Jane’s journey contains: (a) self-discovery, (b) surrendering to animus, (c) a conscious partnership with animus, and (d) self-discovery through self-giving. Baumin and Baumlin recognize John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John as Jane’s “undeveloped animus figure” (20).
“Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was” (350), she reflects. After jostling in the liminal space between the anti-home (Thornfield) and home (Jane’s expected destination) for days, Jane finally reaches the door of Marsh End, home of the Rivers family. Unable to become an animal or human, in hunger, thirst, and tiredness, Jane collapses.31

The last shelter that offers Jane Eyre a chance to find home is Marsh End. Consisting of St. John Rivers, his sisters, Diana and Mary, and their housekeeper, Hannah, Marsh End welcomes her. “My sisters, you see,” says St. John, “have a pleasure in keeping you [...] as they would have a pleasure in keeping and cherishing a half-frozen bird, some wintry wind might have driven through their casement” (400). As always, once Jane receives a recognition that allows her identity to be something more than a human, she is comfortable. “The more I knew of the inmates of Marsh End, the better I liked them” (402), she tells her readers. Jane sees Marsh End as a space opposite to Gateshead. Like Mrs. Reed, John, Georgiana, and Eliza, Jane finds Hannah, St. John, Mary, and Diana.32 However, unlike Gateshead, Marsh End encourages her to stay in her own being. While John Reed takes away Jane’s book, St. John provides her multiple books to read. She states,

I liked to read what they liked to read: what they enjoyed, delighted me; what they approved, I reverenced. They loved their sequestered home. I, too, in the grey, small, antique structure, with its low roof, its latticed casements, its mouldering walls, its avenue of aged firs—all grown aslant under the stress of mountain winds; its garden, dark

31 Jane’s collapsing reminds one of her fainting inside the red room. Such incapability to hold one’s consciousness and sanity upright manifests the harmful effects of anti-homes.
32 Baumlin and Baumlin establish that in Marsh End, Jane encounters similar relations compared to her kins at Gateshead. However, while the Gateshead family is always bitter to Jane, the family she finds in Marsh End treat her with respect and care, building a strong contrast with the residents of Gateshead.
with yew and holly—and where no flowers but of the hardiest species would bloom—found a charm both potent and permanent (402).

As in Thornfield, Jane finds employment at Marsh End as well. She becomes a school teacher at Morton and her time with the Rivers family strengthens her belief that she can find a home with them. After inheriting her uncle, John Eyre’s wealth and discovering that the Rivers are her far cousins, elated, Jane tells St. John,

I am resolved I will have a home and connections. I like Marsh End, and I will live at Marsh End; I like Diana and Mary, and I will attach myself for life to Diana and Mary (emphasis added, 446)

However, soon after, the anti-home of Marsh End becomes visible to her in form of St. John Rivers. St. John proposes marriage to Jane not on the condition that he loves her, but on his observation that she will make a good missionary and a good wife. Far from acknowledging her otherworldliness like Helen and Rochester do, he only, willfully, and decidedly, sees her as a social being:

God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary’s wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service (464)

With this observation, St. John demonstrates that a life with him equals a very dedicated, mechanical, and above all, a purely human life. Jane realizes that being his wife signifies being perpetually trapped in her human self and therefore responds, “I do not understand a missionary life: I have never studied missionary labours” (464). Overlooking Jane’s disinterest, St. John further confirms how mechanical life his way of living entails. He promises to set Jane’s routine
“from hour to hour” and guide her time from “moment to moment” (465), ignorantly weakening his case further. However, Jane, the emotional being at the other end of the conversation, expresses, “Nothing speaks or stirs in me while you talk” (465). Since St. John’s recognition of Jane only limits his appreciation to her punctuality, diligence, congeniality, and other such humanly habits (466), Jane finally confesses to her readers, “[i]f I join St. John, I abandon half myself” (466). Just as Jane feels only “half” herself in the red-room, her paradigmal anti-home, Jane realizes that with St. John, she will be half of herself again. The only full identity – made of two – that St. John allows Jane is by stating how she is a mix of a man and a woman: “you have a man’s vigorous brain, you have a woman’s heart and—it would not do,” he says. Unable to accept his rejection of her powers, Jane finally expounds the reason for her rejection: “If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now” (467).

The very night she rejects the Marsh End anti-home, Jane – through a telepathic connection – senses Rochester’s presence. She hears his voice, “Jane! Jane! Jane! – nothing more” (485). The next morning, stating, “‘My spirit […] is willing to do what is right; and my flesh, I hope, is strong enough to accomplish the will of Heaven” (485), Jane decides to visit Mr. Rochester. Since Jane doesn’t plan to return to Thornfield, she plans a temporary trip of “four days” (487). Reaching the manor, however, Jane sees a ruined state. “I looked with timorous joy towards a stately house: I saw a blackened ruin” (449), she mournfully describes. Upon hearing about the fire that ruined Thornfield and killed Bertha, Jane begins sympathizing with Rochester, despite his past faults. “my Mr. Rochester (God bless him, wherever he was!)—was at least alive” (495), she thinks to herself. Discovering that Rochester has now retired in a new house, Ferndean, “a manor-house on a farm” (495), Jane decides to mark a new, and final, trip.
Out of all the houses in Jane Eyre, it is Ferndean that gives Jane a home. Jane closes her autobiography by stating that she has remained at Ferndean for ten years signifying that Ferndean provides the happiness that Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, and Marsh End have been unable to. However, in criticism, readers perceive Jane’s return as an action caused and supported by her inheritance. For instance, observing Jane’s lifelong movement, Clara Mucci writes,

From enclosure as confinement and restriction to exposure as punishment (in Lowood) to the freedom of them miraculous the female self is portrayed in its development towards different levels of awareness, strength, and independence, through a process of progressive elimination of rebellion to a degree of compliance in a peculiar ‘repetition with difference’ of the ‘pilgrim’s progress,’ which is obviously very much in the background (48) 33

Although I concede that Jane’s inheritance provides her the confidence and material support to return to Rochester, I reject that it is the primary reason for her decision to stay at Ferndean. To do this, I must first expose Jane’s complexities to demonstrate how as a character, she is too unpredictable making her inheritance an insufficient reason for her return.

The Jane Eyre of Ferndean, although permanently settled, still displays complexity of character and therefore, only after examining the features of Jane’s final house can one truly rest on the idea that Jane has completed her journey. Jane tells her readers that she has stayed at Ferndean for ten years, which is a time equivalent to her stay at Gateshead and only two years more than her duration of stay at Lowood. While Jane does state, “My Edward and I, then, are happy,” critics overlook the unpredictability in Jane’s character at the novel’s closing and trust her too soon when she says Ferndean is her final home. I state that Jane chooses

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33 In her essay, Mucci compares Jane’s travel to self as pilgrim’s progress
Ferndean as her domicile only because it is her free of anti-home. Any other reason than this (e.g. Jane is independent, Jane loves Rochester) is difficult to rely on given Jane’s unpredictable nature and restless personality.

To elucidate, Jane is a restless character and her frequent abandonment of home makes her an unreliable dweller of one space. That is, none of the houses mentioned in her autobiography have been exempted from her leaving them. Moreover, Jane feels more at home at Thornfield than any other space in the novel, but despite her deep attachment to her companions in that manor, she leaves it. For this reason, it is inadequate evidence for her readers, I argue, to assume that Jane Eyre will never leave Ferndean in search of “new existence” in a new home again. Second, and more importantly, the final passages of the novel showcase Jane’s not only physical, but also her mental inability to rest in one place. After providing her story to the readers in hundreds of pages on events and accounts of her life, Jane (in)famously ends the narrative by dedicating the last passages to St. John Rivers. She demonstrates that despite achieving familial happiness, her mind is elsewhere. Instead of committing her final words to Rochester, the man she has chosen, Jane deeply reflects on the man she rejects. Marine Thormahlen claims that by ending the novel with St. John, Jane establishes the character as “integral to the love story.” Providing an explanation, Mei notes that the ending is “less a fulfillment than imaginative exhaustion” and St. John becomes Jane’s harmless “way of life outside the marriage plot” (115). Only after an examination of Ferndean and its primary inhabitant can one trust that the manor is Jane’s home just as the sea is the selkie’s. Commenting on the selkie bride’s return to the sea, Mcentire states that in every selkie story, “the selkie and her seal skin – her first identity – are eventually reunited” (129). In Donald McDougall’s narration, when the selkie bride, after years of looking, finally finds her seal-skin, she becomes
powerless to do anything but return to the sea. “She can do no other than put on the skin, and when she has done that she must make for the sea, and plunge into the waves, to be seen on earth no more,” he narrates. If one were to deconstruct the moment she sees the Rochester of Ferndean, one realizes that Jane immediately perceives Ferndean free of the anti-home because Rochester’s bestial self now embodies home.

Glancing at Rochester for the first time in Ferndean, Jane infuses her description with animal imagery. She says,

His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour as ever: his port was still erect, his hair was still raven black; nor were his features altered or sunk: not in one year’s space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be quelled or his vigorous prime blighted. But in his countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding—that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson. [...] And, reader, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity?—if you do, you little know me. (497)

The readers who thus look at Jane as, if I may term, a selkie heroine, do know her. We know that if her ideal home is a space that hosts her animal spirit as comfortably as her human nature, her ideal companion is, like Rochester has become, a bestial man. Having finally seen Rochester, Jane senses deep happiness and even though she is encouraged to “drop a kiss on that brow of rock, and on those lips so sternly sealed beneath it” (498), she stops and sates herself by observing him further. “I would not accost him yet” (498), says the satisfied gazer. Only after having convinced herself that she has returned to a partner who is an “equal” (JE 500) to her, a man “metamorphosed into a lion,” does Jane enter her final home and claims that Rochester
“suits the finest fibre of [her] nature” (461). Ferndean, therefore, becomes her last home not because she is independent, but because it grants her seclusion; being situated in a “desolate spot” away from society, it grants her privacy alongside a considerably lessened staff and a blinded partner. Most significantly, Ferndean gives her a companion who is similar to her own self: half animal, half human, and therefore, whole.

Ferndean’s natural setting further strengthens the comparison this chapter makes between Jane’s final home and a selkie’s sea. Like the sea, Ferndean is situated deep within nature. In Rochester’s words, “Ferndean is buried […] in a heavy wood, where sound falls dull, and dies unreverberating” (472). At Ferndean, isolation gives Jane all the privacy and privations she needs to become herself. Martin observes that while Gateshead, the house Jane begins her narrative in, is farthest from nature, Ferndean is closest to it (130). Martin writes,

In going from the unnatural exclusiveness of Gateshead to the natural seclusion of Ferndean, Jane never finds the ‘busy world’ of action for which she yearns. Instead, she discovers an inner world of imagination and passionate attachment to Rochester (130).

Martin notes that the names of all the houses that are significant in Jane’s narrative come from compound words and an analysis of each name reveals their proximity to (or distance from) nature. While ‘Gate-shead,’ with words relating to the city scape, denotes a space within the city, for Martin, ‘Low-wood’ suggests unhealthy atmosphere. Similarly, Martin believes that while ‘Thorn-field’ does indicate natural surroundings, thorns suggest harshness. ‘Moor-house’ and ‘Marsh End,’ on the other hand, suggest for Martin that “the home’s situation on the boundary between the fresh, healthful moors and the dangerous confusing marsh” (130). ‘Fern-dean,’

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34 Intriguingly, seals are also known as sea-lions
however, denotes “delicate fern and the sheltered valley,” he states. Martin, thus, concludes that Jane’s development begins from a space to culture and culminates in nature. He writes,

In Jane Eyre, culture is often the enemy of nature; the class system, for instance, opposes nature, denies individuality, and distorts personality. Too much culture […] destroys the balance between nature and culture and represses the self. Yet in showing how Jane’s true self develops through her education, the novel goes against the grain of the Victorian convention that education was dangerous for women (140)

Although I agree that Jane’s development can be seen through a journey from culture back to nature, I claim that according to Bronte, it is Jane’s active search of home and a strong sense of rejection of anti-home that gives her the strength alongside her education. Like a selkie who too seeks to journey from the house of culture (fisherman’s house where she lives as his wife) to the house of nature (the sea), it is her relentlessness that allows her to successfully reach home.

As I mention above, a reading that recognizes the selkie as a companion figure to read Jane’s narrative with not only demystifies why Jane moves from one house to the other and finally settles at Ferndean, but also demonstrates Bronte’s perception that the remedy to the women’s question begins with a strong understanding of home. Nicola Bown argues, “Victorians’ enchantment with fairyland is central to understanding their emotional responses to their own world” (2). Indeed, Bronte’s incorporation of the fairy tradition significantly demonstrates her reaction to the social issues of the Victorian period, especially those faced by women in the mid-Victorian century. As Auerbach and Knoepflmacher observe, Bronte engages with fairy tale and fairy lore elements at the risk of being “stereotyped as fantasist[t]” (12) as a female Victorian author. The writers explain the “decided disadvantage” Victorian women faced
as opposed to men like Tennyson, Dickens, or Ruskin, having participated in fairy stories. Despite knowing, in Helen Davis’s words, the “limitations placed on [her] discursive authority” by societal conventions, Bronte actively participates in Britain’s fairy lore by introducing a heroine who is regularly perceived to be angel, imp, elf, fairy, sylph, witch, and other such otherworldly beings. Such eagerness demonstrates Bronte’s interest in engaging with the woman question by arguing for ‘equality of opportunity’ – a notion that pervades the Victorian mindset during the time of *Jane Eyre*’s creation. *Jane Eyre*, in Marcus’s words, shares its “contemporaneity with the height of British capitalism and imperialism” (207). Similarly, expounding on the social condition of England in the 1830s and 40s, Richard Altick writes, “middle class influenced the tone and temper of Victorian society more than it influenced politics” (89) and the working-class built the People’s Charter (90). Britain, going through the “hungry 1840s” hosted much “tension and unrest” following the coming of machines that replaced seasoned workers in the labor market, building “popular bitterness against the political establishment” (89). Bronte’s bitterness, clearly, lies in the subject of gender equality that existed in her contemporary society. Esther Godfrey explains that during *Jane Eyre*’s publication,

> [The] gendered realms of labor were inextricably bound with class economics; rather than experiencing a dramatic division of a masculine workplace and feminine domesticity, working-class laborers witnessed an increased blurring of gender division by the mid-1840s. […]

Moreover, the corresponding polarization of male and female realms within the middle class can be read as the result of a larger societal anxiety about gender identities that emerged from the instability of working-class gender roles in the new social framework (854)

35 Such participation demonstrated women’s distance from “the realism of everyday” (Auerbach and Knoepflmacher 12).
By creating an orphan heroine who is a governess by profession and fairy by imposition, Bronte comments on the said polarization of gender identities and makes a case for gender equality. First, as a selkie heroine, Jane Eyre stands as a model for women troubled and trapped in unhappy marriages. Mcentire compares a selkie bride’s return to the sea to a woman getting “a chance to escape her marriage” (135). She explains,

‘The Seal Woman’ texts remind us of tensions inherent in marital life, of freedom relinquished and adaptive measure taken to ‘make the best’ of a confined domestic world and a longing that will not go away. If marriage turns sour, women may wish for a return to their former ‘self,’ just as the selkie longs for the sea (135).

At the same time, Mcentire also admits that what the selkie bride does in a folk tale is “complicated in real life” (135). However, Bronte makes it attainable. Instead of endowing her heroine with something completely new in the end of the novel, Bronte gives Jane something revised. Jane receives the comfort of home in Ferndean after journeying through a series of anti-homes and achieves happiness with Rochester after going through a multitude of tribulations together. Despite the complicacies and the strenuousness Jane encounters throughout the narrative, she enters a home that she has earned. In Rowe’s words, she attains a “closure derived from maturity and complexity” (71). Plausibly, Bronte exemplifies that to cultivate happiness, is indeed, a necessity of life. Jane does what Lucy Snowe initially thinks impossible in Bronte’s later novel, Villette (1853): she plants her happiness in mould and tills it with manure. Hence, Bronte suggests that only after a (or a series of) brave rejection(s) of an anti-home can one reach home. Gilbert and Gubar claim that to survive a patriarchal society, a woman must endure and
overcome oppression (Gateshead), starvation (Lowood), madness (Thornfield), and coldness (Marsh End). By having successfully passed through them, Jane does overcome society’s patriarchal clasp on women. Rowe notes that Jane “def[ies] larger-than-life authorities and journ[ies] into foreign environments, seeking a rugged independence, but sacrificing heart and family comforts” (75). However, in fact, Jane doesn’t see familial bliss as something that opposes her independence. Instead, she finds a home that allows her both. An angel in the house, therefore, for Bronte, isn’t “venerated, yet isolated” (Rowe 69), but can be venerated as well as isolated – if she finds the right home to live in. Speaking of Bronte’s interest in participating in social issues, Patricia Beer writes, “[Bronte] developed […] sensible right-mindedness on the various issues of the Woman Question [as] personal concerns of herself and her friends” (31). By presenting “abhorrence for marital tyranny” Beer mentions that Bronte also “challenged the accepted method of educating girls” (31). Truly so, it seems that through Jane Eyre, Bronte is in conversation with the women in her society and circle. As Jane persistently searches for equality of treatment from Rochester, Bronte encourages “notions of mutual respect” (31) in marriage through her creation. In a similar vein, Silver notes that by engaging with the Victorian fairy tradition, authors sought to comment on ideas regarding the nineteenth-century social position of women. She writes,

In a period of debates on the origins of matrimony, on women’s right to property and to divorce, an era of the discussion of gender power relations, swan-maiden tales raised questions about female power and sexuality as well as about female superiority, equality, or inferiority (Silver 8)

In a powerful and passionate scene shared by her and Rochester, Jane articulates,
Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! [...] I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal,—as we are! (Bronte 292)

While Jane, the selkie-heroine, inspires women to actively search for happiness than passively mourn inequality, by creating a male character like Rochester and endowing him a significant character arc, Bronte speaks for the revision of Victorian masculinity and patriarchy as well. In *Jane Eyre*, Bronte revises the Rochester of Thornfield Hall and presents the Rochester of Ferndean. Describing her beloved character in a letter to Williams in June 1848, Bronte writes,

> Mr. Rochester has a thoughtful nature and a very feeling heart; he is neither selfish nor self-indulgent; he is ill-educated, mis-guided, errs, when he does err, through rashness and inexperience: he lives for a time as too many other men live – but being radically better than other men, he does not like that degraded life (99)

Evidently, Bronte places Rochester in contrast with John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, and even St. John, primarily by differentiating his behavior toward Jane from “other men[‘s].” Mucci states that for the Victorian society, “a woman not supported by a male relative was an exception to a civilized rule” (61). However, despite Jane’s opposition of this civilized rule in the scene where upon Rochester’s enquiry, she denies having any past connection, Rochester doesn’t condemn her. Instead, he attempts to construe the new governess. Although Rochester’s comprehension isn’t ideal as he concludes that the socially isolated Jane must be supernatural, it is better than what Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane’s “personal destroyer” (22) as identified by Baumlin
and Baumlin, infers. When he places Jane on the dreaded stool, Brocklehurst ostracizes Jane calling her an alien. However, on the other hand, Rochester recognizes similar otherworldly characteristics in Jane and instead of criticizing them, he welcomes her into his home, seeks to understand her through her art, and eventually, sees her as his equal despite their difference in gender and status.

Bronte, through Rochester’s acceptance of Jane, also writes the novel in defense of the figure of the governess. In a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey in May 1848, Bronte reflects on the social perception of governesses and writes,

Those who would urge on Governesses more acquirements do not know the origin of their chief sufferings. It is more physical and mental strength, denser moral impassibility that they require, rather than additional skill in arts or sciences (65)

However, Victorian society little understood their “chief sufferings.” For a Victorian household, the governess lived in an ambivalent and ambiguous position, writes Terry Eagleton. Mucci explains how: “the governess was not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress but an unprecedented case in terms of role and status, which defied clear definition” (61). Therefore, as Poovey states, the figure of the governess for a Victorian society garnered much “anxiety” (43) as she “called into question the morality and contemporaries claimed was natural to women” (45). However, Bronte, having been a governess herself, makes it possible for a governess to retain her individual identity away from the social one, regulate her sexuality, and at the same time, even reject her employer’s offer of marriage. Poovey writes,

What the Victorians feared was that the governess might not be able to control her own sexuality – much less the sexual temptations to which her young charges were
exposed or those that she, as a young unmarried woman, was thought to pose to the family’s male members (45).

In Jane’s rejection of Rochester, Bronte elevates the figure of the governess and argues for a revision of perception. By choosing to not only write about a governess’s journey, but write being her i.e, through the genre of the autobiography, Bronte engages with social conversations with credibility and authority. By making her heroine a governess who is fearlessly unapologetic, Bronte asks women to defend their autonomy instead of seeking sympathy.

By exposing the paradox of the domestic sphere and the anti-home of Victorian households, Bronte first urges women to break the metaphorical walls of confinement and second, through fairy tale references, Bronte comments on the unfair gender equality of Victorian society. Lastly, making Jane a governess, Bronte also defends the infamous profession of nineteenth-century England, thus successfully providing a remedy for the ‘condition of women’ question that she believes society and literature lacks. Bronte encourages women to choose their happiness rather than settling for one imposed by social norms. In leaving Rochester, Jane chooses a ghastly uncertain future over a marriage into an established household, and in rejecting St. John, Jane rejects a life of religious service. Despite the chances she takes, Jane secures a happy ending, which demonstrates Bronte’s belief that prioritizing one’s individuality guarantees a happy life. Finally, writing *Jane Eyre* and creating a selkie heroine, Bronte makes a powerful statement on the notion of female bestiality as well. Silver writes that by telling tales about fairy brides, Victorian authors confront the question, “Were women originally animals needing control […]?” (8). Bronte evidently suggests that if a woman courageously rejects the anti-home and finds a home of her own, where she can live like a selkie
(an amalgamation of animal and human), her bestiality will only make her, and her household, stronger.

3 SELF AND ANTI-SELF: THE TWO LIVES OF LUCY SNOWE

I often wish to say something about the ‘condition of women’ question […] One can see where the evil lies – but who can point out the remedy?

- Charlotte Bronte

In Chapter 1, I critically substantiate Charlotte Bronte’s engagement with the ‘condition of women’ question and claim that writing *Jane Eyre* (1847), Bronte indicates, if there is a remedy to the ‘woman question,’ it begins with a re-conception of the woman’s realm – the home. By writing *Jane Eyre*, a novel about a young girl who continually risks homelessness in her pursuit of independence, I observe Bronte’s intimation that the Victorian domestic sphere is fundamentally dyadic in nature. Chiefly, it comprises of two kinds of spaces, one that favors female subjectivity and one that deteriorates it. Terming these spaces *home* and *anti-home* respectively, I demonstrate Bronte’s notion that a woman loses her individuality when the restrictions posed by the *anti-home* overpowers her personal identity as well as her preferred manner of living. I observe that in *Jane Eyre*, the *anti-home* in each of the houses instigates as well as complicates Jane’s individualistic journey toward a greater understanding of herself. To expound and authenticate this argument, I study the ontological similarities between Jane, who is – in many ways – the quintessential Brontean heroine, and the selkie, a fairy bride figure from Victorian folklore. Placing the myth of the selkie as a companion tale to *Jane Eyre*, I demystify Jane’s restless nature and reveal Bronte’s proposition that to identify and nourish one’s individuality, a Victorian woman must seek a *home*. Unlike Helen Burns and Bertha Mason who are fatally trapped in the *anti-homes* of their respective houses, Jane finds a *home* that celebrates
her inner nature. While I examine the effects of home and anti-home on female subjectivity in Chapter 1, I investigate Bronte’s prescribed method outliving the anti-home in Chapter 2. Focusing on Villette (1853), I argue that according to Bronte, to efficaciously find home, one must first recognize the anti-home as a pernicious force in the domestic sphere and second, examine the effects it has on one’s individuality. In Villette, Lucy Snowe not only demonstrates an ability to diagnose an anti-home, but also undergoes self-examination (through self-division) upon encountering one, so as to successfully escape it. This ability, I believe, is what Bronte prescribes as a “remedy” to the evils surrounding condition of women question of nineteenth-century England.

In Chapter 2, I continue the conviction that the selkie’s narrative facilitates a comprehensive understanding of a Brontean heroine and her journey. Therefore, I once again examine the mythical tale, this time focusing on the selkie’s behavior in her anti-home, the land. Trapped in one form of existence on land, i.e, the human form, the selkie begins to scrutinize her own identity, something Lucy does when she feels the traps of an anti-home in Villette. Both the selkie and Lucy, subsequently, undergo an act of self-division. While critics study Lucy’s divided selfhood in Villette as a condition that is consequential and thus, unintentional and weakening, I see Lucy’s self-division as a strategy. In my reading, Lucy is less a victim and more a survivor as she undergoes self-division in the same manner a selkie does. However, to understand how the selkie undertakes divided selfhood, one must first consider the circumstances that lead to her entrapment in land. According to folklore, a fisherman can capture a selkie only at an opportune moment. Hiding behind the rocky shores of North Sea, he waits for grey seals to transform into beautiful maidens by removing their animal skin off their bodies. When the sun

37 In this chapter, I use the words, “self-division” and “divided selfhood” interchangeably keeping in mind the difference in their tense.
sets, marking the time for the selkie flock to return to the waters, the fisherman hides one of the seal skins to prevent its owner from transforming back to a seal. As the selkie pleads for her skin, the fisherman negotiates, promising to return it only if she marries him. Through such stealth and trickery, he captures a selkie and makes her his bride. On land, the selkie learns to adapt, but dispossessed of her skin, she is never content. She realizes that the land is only an anti-home, and her home awaits her in the sea. Consequently, the selkie persistently searches for her lost skin that she now sees as a material object that will grant her freedom.

Folklorist Nancy Cassell McEntire writes,

[the selkie] keeps her sense of self through sympathetic connection with her sealskin. Even though she is physically separated from it, she maintains a longing for it and for the freedom that it represents (135)

In her anti-home, the selkie, thus, realizes that she now has two identities: first, the self she originally is (I call this self) and second, the self that she has no choice than to adopt in the anti-home (I call this anti-self). Hence, the selkie’s strength lies in her ability to discern: she is living in the anti-self and only with the help of her skin can she find her self. Lucy carries the same strength, something that not only helps her escape the anti-home, but also what women of nineteenth-century Britain regrettably lacked.

A similar pair of the selves is noticeable in Villette when Lucy reveals that she has two possible ways of existing. She demonstrates this most memorably during a moment of self-

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38 Selkie folklore lacks exploration of diverse gender relations and restricts the selkie tales to male fishermen stealing the skins of female selkies. Although there are tales about male selkies seducing unhappy, female humans in the shore, the tales mostly function within the male/female dynamic. Hence, a selkie bride’s capturer is always a man.

39 I discuss the idea that the skin becomes a material object in page 28

40 ‘Self’ being a common term in any project that performs a psychoanalytical study, I put the terms ‘self’ and ‘anti-self’ in italics to differentiate them from ‘self.’ Similarly, home is different from ‘home’ as well.

41 I elaborate on this in pages 25-6
reflection before teaching a class for the very first time. Unwilling to teach and simultaneously noticing the necessity to do so, Lucy privately announces,

I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter (85)

Lucy realizes that she can either live a life of thought, or a life of reality. Hence, whenever she encounters an anti-home, she starts behaving like the selkie on land; she notices that there has been a loss of self and the life she is made to live contains only an anti-self. Just as the selkie looks for her skin to transform back to her self, Lucy looks for material means to regain her self as well. Hence, in this chapter, I argue that through Lucy’s understanding of self and anti-self, Bronte provides a guidebook for her contemporary Victorian women to identify and escape the way of living that detaches them from their originality, that is, from what they would do had there been no social boundaries. As Lucy looks for material objects to take her home, I also study how Bronte, writing at the peak of Britain’s industrial revolution, urges women to understand that emancipation is dependent on their participation with the material world. By establishing an interconnection between self and the material through Lucy and giving her a liberated life in the end of the novel, Bronte demonstrates the success of a woman who carries Britain’s ability to consolidate the mind and the matter in order to find a space that will encourage her individuality, to find home.

I begin this chapter by first explicating what is Lucy Snowe’s self. I move on to an analysis of Lucy’s interactions with the different anti-homes and notice that in each encounter, Lucy demonstrates an understanding that she has lost her self and now carries an anti-
**self.** Eventually, I observe that Lucy takes help from material objects to find her **self.** I speculate Bronte’s intimation through such narrative and conclude this chapter by stating, writing *Villette,* Bronte not only asks women to hold a strong sense of individuality to find home, but also – subtly – makes a case in favor of women and property ownership – an issue key in the ‘condition of women’ question that gains prominence two decades after Bronte’s death in 1855.42

Before transporting the theory of **self** and anti-**self** to Lucy’s narrative in *Villette,* however, I must explicate how it differs from Carl Jung’s archetypes: Self and persona. In Jungian theory of psychoanalysis, Self (a term deliberately capitalized by Jungians) is the result of an integration of conscious and the unconscious. The theory suggests that the ultimate objective for any individual is to recognize their Self. In *The Integration of Personality* (1939), Jung writes,

> [Self] is a term that is meant to include the totality of the psyche in so far it manifests itself in an individual. The self is not only the center, but also the circumference that encloses consciousness and the unconscious (Dell 96)43

Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson explain that Self is, therefore, the “goal of the psychic development” (xxviii). Similarly, David L. Hart states, “[Self is] the great regulator and promoter of psychological wholeness [and] a central guiding force” (97). While Self, then, lies at the center of an individual’s consciousness of their own identity – an identity that includes multiple archetypes and goes through multiple phases of recognizing those archetypes –, **self** is a state of being. An individual assumes **self** when he or she is alone, free of any duties or

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42 I see Bronte’s attempt as subtle because her letters to her publisher reveal that despite her interest in current events and women’s issues, Bronte doesn’t admit that she has written on the matter. Speaking of *Jane Eyre,* she writes to her publisher in 1847, “It has no learning, no research, it discusses no subject of public interest.” Similarly, of *Villette,* Bronte once again writes to the same publisher that unlike *Shirley* does, “*Villette* touches on no matter of public interest.” Scholarship on Bronte’s novels make it evident that she does touch upon social issues in *Jane Eyre* as well as *Villette* even though Bronte admits that she did so only in *Shirley.*

43 Stanley Dell is Jung’s English translator who compiles and edits *The Integration of Personality*
obligations toward social roles and relationships. *Self* reveals their uniqueness and makes an individual singular. Hence, while Jungian *Self* is a concept that represents a wholeness of being and comes from an integration of two separate modes (conscious and unconscious), I see *self* as an individual’s *preferred* mode of being. It comes not from a union of elements, but exists singularly, in isolation. In fact, *self* is prominent when differentiated (rather than integrated) from any other forms of being that an individual adopts in a lifetime. For Jung, Charlotte Bronte’s *Self* would be her recognition of her heritage, familial relationships, her duty, thoughts, and her desires. However, in my definition, *self* is the identity Charlotte Bronte assumes when she is alone. Perhaps her *self* is a poet or a novelist. Her 1837 letter to Robert Southey validates my conjecture:

> I have endeavored not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don’t always succeed, for sometimes when I’m teaching or sewing, I would rather be reading or writing (*Letters* 169)

*Persona*, on the other hand, is different from *anti-self* as well. According to Jung, ‘*persona*’ is the disguise worn by an individual to project a public face that is different from the private face. The *persona* conceals the private identity of the individual. Ann Beldford Unalov explains that in Jungian theory, *persona* is the “mask we adopt for social functioning” (323). In *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, Michael Payne and Jessica Rae Barbera explain it as being “the conscious ideal of the personality, the mask worn in one’s daily intercourse in society” (376). The *anti-self* is different because it is the opposite of *self*, not a mask but an identity that exists as an alternate to the private identity. While *persona* comes with an individual’s deliberate attempt to conceal the private identity and display a more favorable one to gain a good impression in the social sphere, the *anti-self* is an identity that is enforced rather than
willfully adopted. Bronte’s *anti-self* is, therefore, her identity or state of being when she is restricted from writing as a result of her familial and social responsibilities. Most importantly, while the persona is just an addition to one’s identity that allows a favorable existence in a society, in my theory of *self* and *anti-self*, the two elements can’t coexist. An individual is either *self* and therefore at *home* or trapped in their *anti-self* because they are in *anti-home*.

While I construe Lucy Snowe’s self-division of *self* and *anti-self* as Bronte’s attempt to present a female identity in two possibilities: one individualistic and the other forced, critics perceive her divided selfhood as a condition indicative of a woman’s trials. In addition, some Bronte scholars also see the self-division as Bronte’s depiction of the unfair gender divisions existing in nineteenth-century British society. That Lucy’s self-division suggests her motivation to retain her individuality by escaping a harmful sphere is a thought yet underexplored in criticism. Lucy’s self-division, for critics, is chiefly a problem than a solution.

In 1954, Kathleen Tillotson briefly mentions Lucy’s self-division in *Novels of the Eighteen Forties*. She sees the heroine’s “inner debates” as being representative of her carrying two selves and concludes that such character trait demonstrates Bronte’s “intense concentration” on her creation (149). Consequently, Tillotson foreruns the critical trend of perceiving Lucy’s ruminations in form of self-division as means to understand her creator. In similar veins, Robert A. Colby observes Bronte’s position as female author in a male dominated literary world and argues that Bronte creates a work that has “a novelist writing a novel at [its] center” (415) as a response to such domination. Therefore, for Colby, Lucy’s self-division denotes self-observation. He states,
Lucy is really observing herself in the process of composing, creating characters and re-creating herself, and one understands therefore why she is so preoccupied with the workings of the minds and the imagination (415).

Colby correlates Lucy’s self-division with her inclination toward “character analysis” (415) and argues that by creating a complicated character who is fond of observing and examining herself as well as characters around her, Bronte plays with the action of creation itself. In Charlotte Bronte, the Self Conceived (1976), Helene Moglen, on the other hand, focuses more on the character than the author when it comes to examining the divided selfhood depicted in the novel. Professing that Lucy “feels too much” (198), Moglen states that Lucy represses her feelings and appeals to ‘reason,’ creating a private self and a public self, whose conflict “test [Lucy] into growth” (203). Reminding one of Jungian theory of individuation, Moglen sees the two selves eventually coming together to aid a character growth in the novel. She, however, only briefly speaks of the effect of the conflict of the selves on Lucy’s progression. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in Madwoman in the Attic (1979), Lucy’s divided selfhood, i.e., her admission that her “reason” and “imagination” as separate faculties, validates her position as a victim. They write,

“Reason” and “imagination” are the terms she uses to describe the conflict between her conscious self-repression and the libidinal desires she fears and hopes will possess her, but significantly she maintains a sense of herself as separate from both forces and she therefore feels victimized by both (411).

Explaining the “self-division” (412) further, Gilbert and Gubar pair Lucy’s two selves with the two Biblical characters, Jael and Sisiera. According to the writers, just as Jael, Heber’s wife and Sisera’s host, who murders Sisera in his sleep by hammering a nail through his head to
ensure he doesn’t escape, Lucy’s conscious self kills her desires to ensure they don’t express themselves. Hence, Lucy becomes, in words of Gilbert and Gubar, “both the unconscious, dying stranger [Sisera] and the housekeeper who murders the unsuspecting guest [Jael]” (412). As a result, the authors state that Lucy’s life becomes “a living death” (400), indicating that the self-division only points to Lucy’s mental weakening. In similar vein, in the introductory note to The Voyage In (1983), editors Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland read Lucy’s self-division as a condition that emerges from her “confinement to inner life” that later problematizes her public life. Like Moglen, Abel et. al see the two selves juxtaposed rather than existing separately. Reiterating Gilbert and Gubar, Abel et. al see the conflict within the selves as something that consumes Lucy and state that her confinement “enforces an isolation that may culminate in death” (8). In another chapter within The Voyage In, Brenda R. Silver reads Lucy’s divided selfhood as an act of “internaliz[ing] the very maxims that restrict her development” (94). Silver notes,

Not only does [Lucy] lack a blueprint for her journey to selfhood – that is, a conventional plot – but she envisions and presents herself as a divided being whose strengths and weaknesses, as well as her economic and emotional needs, are continually at odds with each other. Forced by circumstances into self-reliance and exertion […] she struggles to compromise between her necessarily unconventional actions and her need to remain within the social structure (94).

Evidently, Silver sees the self-division as an aspect that challenges Lucy’s wellbeing as well. In Eros and Psyche (1984), however, Karen Chase applies the effects of Lucy’s divided selfhood back to Bronte like Tillotson does. According to Chase, Bronte’s attempt to create a
That is, carrying an interest in philosophical psychology, Chase notes that Bronte studies, “the human mind in terms of a few leading faculties: reason, judgment, conscience, memory, feeling, imagination” (52-3). As a result, Chase claims that Bronte’s leaning toward “Passion-Reason dichotomy” as the two faculties exhibited by Lucy’s private self and public self respectively, reveals Bronte’s own dependence on the “formulation” (53) through Villette’s “root struggle as an intrapsychic conflict (67).

While critics, thus, frequently perceive Lucy’s divided selfhood as a condition, Nina Auerbach construes it as an action. In Romantic Imprisonment (1985), Auerbach notices that Lucy, as a result of painful isolation, not only divides herself, but applies the division to other characters as well. Auerbach further claims that Lucy not only explores herself in the divide but as a narrator, she divides her human subjects as well. She writes, “[Lucy] takes revenge on characters who exclude her by splitting them into two” (208). Consequently, Auerbach notices that Lucy reduces the characters to what they are in a particular moment than what they are in essence. She writes, “as a Cubist painting […] Lucy does not reflect the stable essence of a character, she presents the ‘view of a character’ as it fluctuates from moment to moment, refracted by split in Lucy herself” (208). Auerbach concludes, “[t]his method of characterization is appropriate to a world whose absolute definition is problematical, where only reality available is inward battle” (208), hinting that Lucy’s isolation is the root cause of any division noticeable in a character in Villette.

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44 Chase calls the interest new because she observes that Bronte’s Angrian tales are simpler, compared to her latter works. Chase writes, “In Angria inclinations were simple; only circumstances were complex. But through the course of her later career, Bronte attempts to mark out an intricate private realm, attentive to motional nuance and self-division” (52)
In the 1990s, critics continue being a part of the critical pendulum that sees Lucy’s self-division either as a factor that exposes Bronte’s reservations as a female author writing in a male-centric literary world, or as a character trait that reveals Lucy as a victimized being. Robyn R. Warhol, for instance, sees the self-division as a doubleness and claims that through such depiction of selves, Bronte “resist[s] categorization as one thing or the other” (857). Speaking of the meaning and value of ‘doubleness’ in feminist criticism and narratives, Warhol further states, “to invoke ‘doubleness’ is to address binary oppositions without resting comfortably in either of the two terms being opposed” (857). Beverly Forsyth, like Gilbert and Gubar, sees Lucy’s self-division as an aspect of her nature that victimizes her instead of granting her freedom from an oppressed state. Forsyth argues that Lucy is trapped within her “inward voices that torment, tease, and direct” (18) her. As a result, she claims that Lucy’s inability to find an outlet to her feelings make her the victim of “borderline schizophrenia” (18). Criticism in the twenty-first century present a similar treatment of Lucy’s divided selfhood. In the introductory note to the 2000 edition of *Villette*, Tim Dolin agrees with scholarship of the preceding decades saying Lucy Snowe “has no ultimate and stable identity” (xxii). Gretchen Braun sees the division as indicative of Lucy’s “mysterious bereavement” (197). Braun elaborates on this bereavement by identifying Lucy’s tragic temperament in the novel as something that can only branch from a traumatic childhood experience. Although Braun too thinks of Lucy’s divided self as a character trait that reveals her past suffering, she admits that the conflict, at the same time, grants *Villette* its core action. She writes,

45 In “‘A Great Break in the Common Course of Confession’: Narrating Loss in Charlotte Bronte’s *Villette*,” Braun claims that Lucy Snowe suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and states that only “a complex understanding of trauma” can explain the novel’s structure as well as content.
The disjunction between her powerful desires and emotions and her socially limited means to act upon or express them provides narrative tension even as it produces a seemingly wandering, circular, and action-less plot (197)

Helen H. Davis, on the other hand, sees the division of self as well as *Villette*’s narrative technique as indicative of Bronte’s critique on the thematic extent male authors of nineteenth-century England could go compared to how less women authors could creatively traverse. According to Davis, the two lives of Lucy Snowe compliment Bronte’s manner of adapting two narratological positions an author could take in nineteenth-century literary sphere depending on their sex. The ‘life of thought,’ thus, being what a male author could do and the female author wanted to do, and ‘life of reality’ being what a female author, like Bronte, had to settle for. Proposing the term ‘circumnarration’ to denote a narrative technique that allows a narrator to evade recollection of certain events – something Lucy readily does – Davis states that through circumnarration,

Bronte reveal[s] the ambiguities that arise from an author’s simultaneous urge to narrate possibilities outside of the boundaries of social norms while also conforming to social and narrative expectations sufficiently to create a text that can and will be successfully disseminated (199)

Hence, in the last seven decades of Bronte scholarship, critics see Lucy’s self-division either as a condition that indicates Lucy’s frail nature and her incapability to confront trials, or as a condition that reflects Victorian society’s prejudicial gender division as construed and depicted by Bronte. Specifically, amidst a range of critical focus paid to Lucy’s divided selfhood, Ryan Crider becomes one of the very few critics who perceive the self-division as Lucy’s strength rather than weakness. “Lucy is able to invent herself as a strong and even subversive character in
spite of her outward attempts at repression” (35), Crider writes. Reading her attempt to conceal her life of ‘thought,’ Crider applies John Kucich’s concept of “self-negation” to Lucy and argues, “Lucy ‘negates’ herself by seeking to conceal her emotional being […] but ultimately these emotions are veiled behind a series of performances that offer Lucy a means of subverting the social expectations” (36). According to Crider, Bronte uses theatricality to represent her heroine’s complexities, granting Lucy not two, but multiple lives because she is always playing a role (36). Being both “a spectator and a participant,” Crider claims that Lucy “emerge[s] psychologically from the repression that initially dominates her character,” a method that points to Bronte’s “feminist impulse behind the novel’s construction” (37). Although Crider shares my observation that Lucy’s divided selfhood represents her strength, he sees Lucy’s selves as coexisting with each other, something I argue against. More importantly, critics rarely see a connection between Lucy’s self-division and her interest in the material world, making my study a new approach to consider the theme of divided selfhood in *Villette*.

Critics who do consider *Villette’s* engagement with material objects either perceive it as Bronte’s artistic attempt to speak the language of industrial England, or as Lucy’s attempt to displace herself unto material objects as a result of isolation and misidentification. Either way, critical attention paid to *Villette’s* preoccupation with the material world doesn’t support the understanding that Lucy’s interest in material objects ensures Bronte’s contention that women be actively linked with the material world. Noticing the overlap between *Villette’s* conception and the Great Exhibition of 1851, Heather Glen, in *Charlotte Bronte: The Imagination in History* (2002), observes how Bronte’s letters to her father about her visit to the Crystal Palace can be read today as “prefigurations of *Villette*;” according to Glen, Bronte transmutes her experience of the Great Exhibition to her text (209). Elaborating on this very act
of transmuting, Eva Badowska observes Bronte’s placement of Lucy’s inner life alongside Villette’s “object-filled interiors” (1510) as Bronte’s way of manifesting the nineteenth-century apprehension that “the pressure of things” will invade the Victorian “true interiority” (1510). Badowska writes,

Often interpreted as a paradigmatic psychological fiction, concerned chiefly with the ineffable qualities of inner life rather than the claims of the material world, Villette is nonetheless anxious about the mutual implications of persons and things (1509)

Kathryn Crowther concurs with Badowskwa and brings forth one of the few critical conversations that connects the subject of ‘self’ with material objects in the novel. Crowther states, “The spectre of commodification” in the novel alludes to the “anxiety surrounding the potential loss of personal identity in an increasingly commodified world” (133). According to Crowther, while Villette confronts the problem of the loss of the individual, it also provides a solution. She explains that in 1850s, Bronte, the author, was both “a producer of goods and an artist” (129) and therefore, she was herself struggling to “preserve [her] authenticity in the face of the increasingly depersonalized world of commodity culture” (129). Creating Lucy who frequently seeks to turn objects into relics, Crowther argues that Bronte attempts to “preserve the connection” (129) between the person and the object. As examples, she points to Lucy’s burial of Dr. John’s letters as a means of preserving the relationship shared by the text and the “hand of the writer” (129) and to Lucy’s recovery from the “fever fit” (V 181) in the Bretton house where her reliance on the familiarity of its objects to recuperate showcases Bronte’s attempt to strengthen the relationship between a person and objects. In all these critical readings, however, Lucy remains a feeble character and her association with objects, critics argue, weaken her more.
This chapter, however, sees Lucy’s interactions with material objects as her attempts to retain self and eventually escape the anti-home.

To begin a discussion on Lucy’s attempts to preserve her self and reject the anti-self, it is essential that I first establish what Lucy’s self is. In Chapter 1, I substantiate that Jane’s self is her animality. When Jane is at home, she becomes akin to an animal. Sitting on the window-seat, Jane takes pleasure on assuming the form of a bird and takes imaginary flights across the geographic regions mentioned in her book. When she meets Bessie for the first time in eight years in Lowood, kindled by the only happy memories she has of Gateshead, Jane loses her thoughts, once again, to a bird chirping outside her window, hence indicating that a thought of home makes her associate herself with an animal. As the novel progresses and Jane travels to Thornfield, we see that Jane is content with Rochester when he identifies her as a non-human, an otherworldly creature. At the same time, Jane sympathizes with Bertha’s animalistic nature to the point of renouncing Rochester for not regarding them. Jane continually hints that her self is best nourished in nature and in the wild. Finally, she resides in Ferndean manor, a home that makes not only her, but also Rochester, a being who is free to embrace their animality. While Jane’s self is discernible, Lucy Snowe’s seems difficult to configure. Even Ginevra Fanshaw, who clings herself to Lucy enough times to know her friend completely, famously wonders who Lucy really is. “Who are you, Miss Snowe?” (341) she asks abruptly one day, putting into a single statement what generations of critics have wondered. “Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don’t look the character” (341), answers Lucy, mocking not only Ginevra, but perhaps everyone who has ever shared Miss Fanshaw’s curiosity. Indeed, Lucy is a complicated character. As a narrator, she conceals her private identity and infamously reveals more about others than herself. Colby recognizes Lucy as Bronte’s “most complex heroine” (417) and Crider
admits that she is a very “frustrating narrator” (35). “[S]he directly discloses very little about herself [and] gives little to no information about her own history,” observes Katie R. Peel. To Peel’s observation, Forsyth adds, “Lucy Snowe is to the outside world an independent confident teacher, yet to the reader she embodies pain in the form of a woman” (17). Evidently, Lucy hides herself beneath the folds of Bronte’s complex characterization and her own ambiguous first-person narration. Adopting circumnarration, Davis points out that Lucy creates a space within the text for her thoughts to operate in, often untouched and unperceived by her friends as well as her readers. Attempting to construe her complicated nature, Mary Ann Kelly writes, “[Lucy is] intellectually mature but emotionally stunted” (345). Although Kelly credits Lucy for being clever, she discovers Lucy’s inability to detach herself from her grief and suggests that despite being unsure of the cause of Lucy’s sorrow, readers are at least certain of the effect. Kelly writes,

> Fear and rage, the results of her arrested grief, battle her longing for the knowledge of how to grieve and proceed. The result is emotional paralysis, isolation, detachment, and perpetually multiplied bereavements (344)

While Kelly recognizes Lucy as an extremely lonely being, Forsyth observes, “Unless the reader is willing to look into the face of pain, there is no way to know the real Lucy Snowe” (17) because outwardly, she is only “a quiet, submissive woman in search of an identity” (18). What her identity, her self is, is yet unknown. Forsyth observes Lucy’s behavior as an auto-diegetic narrator and calls it deviant. As a narrator, Lucy defiantly “represses her memory, feelings, and actions” (18), she states, to the point of repressing even her sexual nature (22). While Kelly and

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46 Reading the manuscript of Villette, Bronte’s publisher, Williams, asks her if Lucy’s lack of history should be amended. To such a suggestion, Bronte replies, “You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid […] If the book does not express all this there must be a great fault somewhere” (Letters 80)
Forsyth, thus, see Lucy’s grief as the key to unlock her personality that is the *self* we are in search of. Peel admits that Lucy carries a flexible personality. She argues that by frequently allowing her readers to imagine her life themselves instead of giving them the textual food for imagination, Lucy “moves beyond the confinement of a fixed identity” (232); she “not only refuses to provide a conventional fixed plot (thus allowing for multiple reader interpretations), but also liberates the reader from a conventional, fixed role” (232). Clearly, Lucy, in Peel’s observation, de-stabilizes herself as well as her readers. Because of this, Margaret Soenser Breen states that in the end, Lucy stands as alone as she does all other times in the narrative (244).

Intriguingly, all these critical readings seem to point toward one idea: Lucy desires not isolation, but anonymity and a concealment of her inner thoughts. Thus, Lucy is at *home* and in her *self* when she is unidentified both to her audience inside and outside the text. She narrates incompletely because she desires to be undetectable. Similarly, she is fluid and flexible because she wants to be a figure who is unseen.\(^{47}\) She seeks to retain her anonymity from her readers and as a result, misguides and well as misinforms them. That is why, in Crider’s terms, Lucy is “content to observe rather than experience” (35). Lucy’s *self*, therefore, is her anonymity and it is so not only because she desires it, but also because her capacity to remain undetected and unidentified gives her strength. She is able to hide behind the veil of a narrator as well as outperform those, like Madame Beck, who examine her by constantly keeping her under their watch. Most importantly, just like Jane’s animality leads her to discovering the most suited companion in Rochester (as he too reflects her animality in the end), Lucy’s anonymity helps her discover the goodness of Monsieur Paul. Paul Emanuel is a character as anonymous as Lucy Snowe, an observation I discuss in greater detail toward the end of this chapter.

\(^{47}\) Boone claims that Lucy “invest[s] in remaining as invisible as possible.” However, I claim that Lucy desires anonymity and not invisibility. This essential difference is discussed further in page 36
While Lucy’s need to remain unidentified singularizes her as a Victorian heroine, it also reveals Bronte’s reservations regarding the social condition women in the nineteenth-century were subjected to – a topic Bronte was keenly interested in. As Gilbert and Gubar state, “*Villette* is [...] the story of the writer’s way out” (403). In my understanding, Bronte depicts a heroine who craves anonymity in response to her own desire to remain unidentified as an author as a result of the social ill-treatment of artistic women. After the publication of *Jane Eyre*, Bronte coveted as much concealment from the public as Lucy seemingly does. In a letter to her publisher and friend, William S. Williams, in 1849, Bronte writes,

You mention the literary coteries. To speak the truth, I recoil from them, though I long to see some of the truly great literary characters. However, this is not to be yet—I cannot sacrifice my incognito. And let me be content with seclusion—it has its advantages. In general, indeed, I am tranquil, it is only now and then that a struggle disturbs me—that I wish for a wider world than Haworth. When it is past, Reason tells me how unfit I am for anything very different (*Letters*)

A popular literary figure in 1849 following the success of *Jane Eyre* in Europe as well as America, Bronte was a sought-after writer in literary communities of England. However, biographers like Elizabeth Gaskell, Judith Barker, as well as Margaret Smith indicate that Bronte highly wished to remain unidentified in any literary sphere. Intriguingly, Bronte’s need to remain ‘incognito’ was not a natural impulse, but planned. This is indicated by her use of the phrase “Reason tells me” in the letter to Williams. The reason specifies Bronte’s discomfort with the social position of female writers in nineteenth-century community. In *Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857), Gaskell states that Bronte’s desire to remain unidentified as a writer denotes her discomfort in being judged as a woman rather than as a writer. Gaskell writes,
Miss Bronte […] had been as anxious as ever to preserve her incognito in “Shirley.” She even fancied that there were fewer traces of a female pen in it than in “Jane Eyre”; and thus, when the earliest reviews were published, and asserted that the mysterious writer must be a woman, she was much disappointed. She especially disliked the lowering of the standard by which to judge a work of fiction, if it proceeded from a feminine pen; and praise mingled with pseudo-gallant allusions to her sex, mortified her far more than actual blame (Life).

Following the publication of Jane Eyre in fall of 1847, Currer Bell (the pseudonym Bronte wrote under) became a household name. In words of Gaskell, “The whole reading-world of England was in a ferment to discover the unknown author of Jane Eyre” (Life). However, while literary personals to magazines like G. H. Lewes, The Spectator, Newcastle Guardian showered Bronte with favorable reviews, getting the hint that the author is indeed a female writer, critics like Elizabeth Rigby criticized the novel for its un-Christian nature. Critics have widely noticed that the disappointment that follows is depicted in the chapter titled “Vashti” in Villette by Bronte where upon hearing Dr. John’s opinion on the actress, Vashti, Lucy inwardly complains, “he judged her as a woman, not an artist” (289). Hence, Bronte’s desire to remain incognito as an author indicate the presence of ‘evils’ that lies in society as she indicates while speaking of finding remedies to the evils of ‘condition of women’ in England. Evidently, Bronte transforms her complaints to her work and bequeaths the desire to remain invisible to her protagonist, Lucy. Therefore, Bronte’s choice to make Lucy a character craving anonymity indeed comes as her critique of the society that first, disallows women to be individualistic, and second, even when she is, judges her for it.

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48 A detailed account of Jane Eyre’s reviews can be read in Margaret Smith’s The Letters of Charlotte Bronte Vol. 1, “Introduction”
Lucy’s inclination toward anonymity also appears to be Bronte’s prescribed method to overcome (through resistance) the paradox of the domestic sphere that I discuss in Chapter 1. Widely considered a woman’s space, I demonstrate that the Victorian domestic sphere encourages the notion that a woman must adapt the essence of an ‘angel in the house’ when she is at home. She must be the ideal wife, sister, daughter, and even when she is an outsider like a governess, she must possess such values to teach young children the same. Paradoxically, then, the domestic sphere is anything but the woman’s realm because inside it, the woman is anything but her true self. Inside the home, she lives with her anti-self more so than her self. However, demanding to remain unidentified, Lucy, in a way, retains her self by spurning the effects of the paradox and questions them. “I had rather be a thing than an angel” (291) Jane tells Rochester before their wedding and it seems Lucy shares the sentiment. Jane and Lucy would rather be inanimate and thus nameless beings rather than an angel. As a result, trying to obtain her self, Lucy constantly attempts to retire to her anonymity. Colby evidences this stating, “Lucy’s tendency, when left to her own devices, is to live life vicariously – through other people’s lives, or through literature, art, and the theatre” (414). Similarly, Forsyth notes,

The reader must learn about other characters before being privileged to receive tidbits of information about the narrator. This frozen woman has no hope, no tomorrow, no life other than what she experiences through others (21)

Hence, Lucy conceals herself and lives through others. For that reason, even as a narrator, Lucy refuses to reveal herself because she hopes to narrate only what lies before her and not within. Lucy attempts to reject the anti-self – an idea that Crider touches upon as well. Noticing Lucy’s ability to nurse dual identities, Crider states,

49 For instance, noting Lucy’s way of narration in the Bretton house, Gilbert and Gubar state, “Instead of participating in the life of the Brettons, Lucy watches it” (403)
In Villette, Lucy gradually manages to ‘invent’ herself as a strong and even subversive character in spite of her outward attempts at repression. The process by which Lucy awakens to an awareness of her own potential strength, betraying this repression, consists of a series of confrontations with her own circumstances as she perceives them, which Judith Williams describes as potentially both ‘a self-protective and self-destructive illusion’ (36).

Crider states, “[Lucy] emerge[s] psychologically from the repression that initially dominates her character” (37).

Similar to the houses in Jane Eyre that each consist of homes and anti-homes that, in turn, allow and disallow Jane to embrace her animality, the houses Lucy moves through in Villette do the same. When Lucy finds home, she gets the opportunity to remain unidentified as a character as well as a narrator. The moment she encounters the anti-home, Lucy experiences a detachment from self and becomes visible and identified in multiple forms. A close look at the opening chapters of the novel validates this observation. In the beginning, Bretton gives Lucy a home. The adult, narrator-Lucy confesses that as a child, she always liked her visits to Bretton because “the house and its inmates specially suited [her]” (emphasis added V. 7). Eventually, when she too becomes an inmate there with Mrs. Bretton, her godmother, and Graham, her godbrother, Lucy plunges more into her anonymous self. She pushes herself to the backdrop of the events occurring in the house to such an extent that any reader reading the first chapters of Villette

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50 In Perception and Expression in the novels of Charlotte Bronte, Williams claims that Lucy fears pain more than any other emotion and as a result of such trepidation, avoids what she thinks will hurt her (4). As a result, ironically, Lucy undergoes an illusion where she is simultaneously protecting and destroying herself (5).
perceives Lucy a homo-diegetic narrator instead of the auto-diegetic narrator that she is.\textsuperscript{51} Forsyth states,

\begin{quote}
It is not even until chapter four that the reader knows for sure that the book is not about Polly and Graham, but rather Miss Snowe. We have no face or qualities to ascribe to the narrator, because this non-being has no life (21)
\end{quote}

Identifying Lucy as a “non-being,” Forsyth validates that Lucy indeed is with no viable identity in the beginning of the novel. A silent, “unseen observer” (Forsyth 25) Lucy overhears conversations, but refrains from engaging in them – something she continues to do throughout the novel whenever she is comfortable in a space, an observation that I discuss in detail eventually.\textsuperscript{52} “Time flowed smoothly for me at my godmother’s,” she narrates “not with tumultuous swiftness, but blandly, like the gliding of a full river through a plain” (V. 8).

Expressing her fondness for such blandness, she further states, “The charm of variety there was not, nor the excitement of incident; […] I liked peace so well and sought stimulus so little […]” (8). In Colby’s words, Lucy spends “her happier girlhood” (417) in that house. Lucy’s anonymity and aloofness at Bretton is evidenced by the scene where she is surprised to find, upon entering her room after a long walk one day, an additional bed. “I found […] an unexpected change […] In addition to my own French bed in its shady recess, appeared in a corner a small crib” (8), she says. It is only after she asks Mrs. Bretton does she find the reason behind the change. This indicates that Mrs. Bretton doesn’t initially feel the need to inform Lucy about a

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\textsuperscript{51} In Gerard Gennette’s theory of narratology presented in \textit{Narrative Discourse} (1980), Gennette describes the many forms of narration stating an autodiegetic narrator is the first-person narrator who is also the protagonist of a story. Homodiegetic narrator, according to Gennette, is a first-person narrator, but only a minor character in the story being told. Lucy appears, at first, to be homodiegetic narrator as she speaks more of Polly and Graham, the “Playmates” instead of herself. However, after Polly leaves, we learn that the story is about the happenings in Lucy’s life and she, not Polly, is the protagonist of \textit{Villette}.

\textsuperscript{52} Joseph A. Boone states that Lucy eventually becomes the “unseen observer” of Madame Beck’s activities in Rue Fossette, just like the headmistress thinks she herself is
guest who will share her room, proving that she doesn’t know Lucy well enough to guess if she would like or dislike the change. To Mrs. Bretton, Lucy is close to the “non-being” Forsyth mentions. Hence, in the opening chapters of Villette, Lucy gives her readers a glimpse of an ideal space, her home, and allows her readers to perceive that her self is staying unidentified.

The anti-home in Bretton appears following the arrival of Paulina (Polly) Home. As Chiara Briganti states, “It is Paulina’s appearance on a stormy night that begins the series of dispossession and specular reflections which punctuate Lucy’s narrative” (11). Truly so, after Polly arrives, Lucy’s anonymity gets compromised as the little six-year-old girl animates Lucy as a prominent character in the novel. In fact, Polly revives Lucy as a narrator as well, compelling her to come out of the shell of an observer to that of a participator. Consequently, Lucy is exposed to the inhabitants of Bretton as well as to her readers. Lucy comes to fore as a character capable of carrying emotions such as jealousy, judgment, sympathy, as well as indifference. Gilbert and Gubar’s observation corroborate my point as they state, “[Lucy] ridicules Polly’s fanatic responses and doll-like gestures, and satirizes Polly’s refusal to eat, as well as her need to serve food to her father or his surrogate” (404). As a result of such conspicuousness, Lucy encounters an anti-home in Bretton. She experiences a weakening of her self also because her readers get a platform to identify and analyze her. “I, Lucy Snowe” (15), she states for the very first time in the novel, compelled to identify herself. Polly’s animation of Lucy is further reflected in Graham’s identification of her. “You told Lucy Snowe you longed to have a ride” (31), Graham tells the little girl. Not only does he take Lucy’s name, but he utters her full name, revealing that Lucy had indeed been partially unidentified to him so far because had she not, he

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53 For instance, in Chapter III titled “Playmates,” Lucy confesses, “[Polly] was not interesting” (27) as she observes her imitating tasks Mrs. Bretton performed instead of producing original work. Scenes like this indicates Lucy’s judgmental nature.
would have addressed a god-sister differently and perhaps more warmly. Graham’s lack of notice of Lucy at Bretton is also validated by his inability, later on, to recognize her when they meet after eight years. The exposure of Bretton’s anti-home through Polly becomes evident as Lucy notices Polly’s presence disturbing her. “[W]henever, opening a room-door, I found [Polly] seated in a corner alone,” Lucy states. Describing Polly’s presence, she further adds, “that room seemed to me not inhabited, but haunted” (15). Hence, for Lucy, Bretton takes turn in giving her both home and anti-home.

My contention that Lucy’s loss of home leads her to a state of self-scrutiny followed by a search of material means to return to self is corroborated by the opening pages of Chapter 2 in Villette. Losing the comfort of Bretton, after “quitting” (V. 39) it, Lucy ruminates, “there remained no possibility of dependence on others; to myself alone could I look. I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature” (40). Her thoughts immediately go to Miss Marchmont, a distant relation, from who see seeks “a task [she] could undertake” (41). However, instead of being able to gather the means to find a home again, Lucy realizes that she is plunging deeper into the anti-home. This is evidenced by how she reacts to Miss Marchmont’s proposal that Lucy be her constant caretaker. “It will not be an easy life,” the old Lady confesses, to which Lucy responds by undergoing further self-diagnosis:

I reflected. Of course it ought to appear tolerable […] but somehow, by some strange fatality, it would not. To live here, in this close room, the watcher of suffering […] My heart sunk one moment, then it revived; for though I forced myself

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54 It is also possible to read Lucy’s use of the word “haunted” as an indication that Polly’s sadness over her father’s departure makes any space she is in look depleted. However, since all other ghost imageries and analogies in the novel specify ________________________

55 As I state in page 1, self-division is a form of self-scrutiny and for that reason, I use the two actions interchangeably
to *realise* evils, I think I was too prosaic to *idealise*, and consequently to exaggerate them (40-41)

Lucy, thus, manifests her understanding that she has two possible ways of living. Knowing that she has lost her *self*, her heart shrinks as she realizes the evils that lie before her. However, she forces herself to survive and idealize the evils, as a result of which, her heart revives. In this scene, I believe, it is crucial to notice Lucy’s ability to undergo self-division, which is also the ability to understand that while there is a normalized and socially sanctioned way of living for women, there is also one that gives her pleasure and allows her to be original as well as individualistic. Lucy’s self-diagnosis as a way of realizing there is a *self* and an *anti-self* reminds one of Robyn R. Warhol’s statement on women’s ability to self-differentiate themselves, which in turn leads to a better understanding of one’s identity. Warhol writes, “Feminist theory argues for attention to ‘self-difference’ as a factor in identity positioning” (868). Although in Warhol’s argument, the self-difference is mentioned more in relation to the other than one’s own alternative self, it is viable to conclude that by making Lucy able to see herself as two, Bronte also seeks to strengthen Lucy’s “identity positioning.” Bronte knew that women during her times lacked this ability because in the beginning, she lacked it herself. In the same letter to Southey where she confesses her preference to read and write over teaching and sewing, she also states,

> In the evenings, I confess, I do think, but I never trouble any one else with my thoughts. I carefully avoid any appearance of pre-occupation and eccentricity, which might lead those I live amongst to suspect the nature of my pursuits (*Letters* 169)

The pursuit being her dream of becoming an author, in 1837, exactly a decade before the publication of her first novel, Bronte displays the sad reality of Victorian women. They think, but don’t share their thoughts. Addressing this very condition, Sandeeta Dutta writes, “Work for self
development was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine idea” (2311) in the nineteenth-century. Gaskell explains this inherent repression in great detail in her biography of Bronte, *Life*. She states,

When a man becomes an author, it is probably merely a change of employment to him. He takes a portion of that time which has hitherto been devoted to some other study or pursuit […] But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother, as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place: a woman’s principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed (*Life*)

However, observing how Bronte overcomes her repression, Gaskell states what women of talent and desire should do. She writes,

And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents. She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others. […] I put into words what Charlotte Bronte put into actions (*Life*)

Displaying such strength in character, Bronte herself writes to her friend, “I am my own mistress – and can move and speak, undaunted by the fear of man (*Letters* 65). Hence, despite promising to Southey that she would never attempt to be a published author, Bronte sends her manuscript to publishers in the hope of seeing her work in print. Therefore, similar to my argument that a woman’s journey toward individuality begins only when she is able to undergo a

56 “I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print,” she writes in the letter to Southey, and continues, “if the wish should rise, I’ll look at Southey’s letter, and suppress it. It is honour enough for me that I have written to him, and received an answer” (*Letters* 169)
self-division, Gaskell acknowledges that to become a successful writer, Bronte underwent such division herself. She states,

Henceforward Charlotte Bronte’s existence becomes divided into two parallel currents--her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Bronte, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character – not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled (Life)

Doubtlessly, Bronte bequeaths such trait in her heroine. Upon any encounter with the anti-home, Lucy sees her identity in two possibilities.

Lucy’s anti-home intensifies during her years at Miss Marchmont’s as she experiences the loss of self while she builds a living with the old woman. She tells her readers,

Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. […] I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an ever-changing sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick chamber […] All within me became narrowed to my lot. Tame and still by habit, disciplined by destiny, I demanded no walks in the fresh air; (41)

The walks that Lucy enjoyed in Bretton, thus, get replaced by her new circumstances that compel her to forget that nature even exists. Hence, Lucy experiences the anti-self. Deliberating on such moments in Villette where Lucy learns that she is living a life that can easily have a happier alternative, Gilbert and Gubar write,

Lucy Snowe is tormented by the realization that she has bought survival at the price of never fully existing, escaped pain by retreating behind a dull, grave camouflage. Haunted by the persons she might have been, she has been dispossessed not only of
meanings and goals, but also of her own identity and power. How can she escape the person she has become? (400)

The writers, thus, validate the necessity of my study that traces how Lucy does “escape the person she has become,” her anti-self. To overcome the loss of self, like the selkie, Lucy searches for material means to find home. It is conceivable as well as plausible to see the selkie’s seal skin as a material object in the selkie tales. The skin functions not only as an accessory that maidens take off before sunbathing, but also as a property that ensures protection and freedom. In The Testimony of Tradition (1890), folklorist and antiquarian David MacRitchie explains the origin of the myth of the selkie. According to MacRitchie, Finnish women travelled in kayaks and covered themselves in sealskins for protection from the cold in the sea. As the islanders of Orkney and Shetland saw them, they believed the women to be preternatural, thus giving birth to folkloric figures such as selkies. The islanders saw them take their skins off while on land, and put them on as they returned to the sea in their kayaks. As a result, islanders perceived that the women “change[d] themselves into sea-beings” (2) using the seal-skin. Speculating the nature and use of the skin, MacRitchie writes,

The ‘skin’ […] I hold to be their armour, or coat of mail. Perhaps that coat itself was often made of seal-skin, and then covered with metal rings, or scales, as we see it in Norman pictures; for instance, on the Bayeux tapestry (2)

Naturally, MacRitchie sees the skins as equivalent to Finnish women’s properties. Even in the mythical tales, the selkie is unable to return home without their seal-skin. Doubtlessly, the skin, then, functions as the money required to travel, or the property required to free oneself from dependence. Hence, as the selkie in the mythical tales search for her skin, Lucy understands that material means will buy her freedom. After Miss Marchmont dies, Lucy, therefore, forseeing that
she will have to encounter other anti-homes, reflects on her financial status. Intriguingly, Lucy infuses the paragraph that begins with “My mistress being dead” with pecuniary details. She writes,

My mistress being dead, and I once more alone, I had to look out for a new place. […] I grant I was not looking well, but, on the contrary, thin, haggard, and hollow-eyed […] In debt, however, I was not; nor quite poor; for though Miss Marchmont had not had time to benefit me, as, on that last night, she said she intended, yet, after the funeral, my wages were duly paid by her second cousin (48)

Speaking of the generous second cousin, Lucy further states,

[T]he heir, an avaricious-looking man, with pinched nose and narrow temples, who, indeed, I heard long afterwards, turned out a thorough miser: a direct contrast to his generous kinswoman, and a foil to her memory, blessed to this day by the poor and needy (48)

With that account, Lucy then reveals her own condition. “The possessor, then, of fifteen pounds” (48), she decides to go to London.

Lucy chances upon a momentary home in the streets of London. “Walk[ing] alone in London” (V. 54), she gains her anonymity back. Having, simultaneously, a little money to buy “extravagance I could ill afford” (54), she walks the streets with “a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment” (54). However, noticing, eventually, the necessity of “a line of action” (V. 55), Lucy decides to board a ship to the country of Labassecour. Reaching the town of Villette in Labassecour, Lucy encounters her third and greatest anti-home in the novel – Rue Fossette, a girl’s school run by a woman named Modeste Maria Beck. Finding employment in Rue Fossette,

57 The night before her death, Miss Marchmont tells Lucy, “Well, to-morrow I will begin by trying to make you happy. I will endeavor to do something for you, Lucy; something that will benefit you when I am dead” (46).
Lucy starts living in the school as well. However, noticing a loss of *self* while under the “rule” (V. 79) of Madame Beck, Lucy realizes that Madame Beck’s school is her *anti-home*, and therefore, undergoes self-division yet again.

Lucy loses her *self* because living with Madame Beck, Lucy becomes – as a narrator as well as a character – severely conspicuous. From the very first hour inside Rue Fossette, Lucy becomes an object of inspection for its inhabitants. Boone notes how from the moment Lucy enters Rue Fossette, the novel becomes about “spying eyes, knowing gazes, and significant glances” (22), indicating Lucy’s reduction from a subject to a mere object in her surroundings. Immediately after her arrival at the school, Madame Beck engages Paul Emanuel, a fellow teacher, in an act of character investigation. Asking him to use his “skill in physiognomy” (73), Madame Beck requests M. Paul to “read [Lucy’s] countenance” (73). “The little man fixed on me his spectacles […] he meant to see through me” (73), Lucy tells her readers. Not only does M. Paul read Lucy physically, but her nationality is put under inspection as well. Madame Beck and M. Paul discuss Lucy’s abilities and inabilities in detail. Lucy mentions that they “scrutiniz[e]” her and give a “judgment” at the end of the scrutiny. Naturally, Lucy’s anonymity is challenged. The investigation, however, doesn’t end. Madame Beck inspects Lucy further that very night in her sleep as she examines her belongings acutely. As she lifts Lucy’s hand from her forehead to examine her face, rummages through her belongings to inspect her possessions, and finally, looks at Miss Marchmont’s lock of hair that Lucy has preserved, Madame Beck, arguably, studies Lucy’s body, possessions, as well as her mind. In this manner, the headmistress “read[s] [her] private memoranda” (V. 80) which Lucy finds “hardly fair or justifiable” (V. 76). She feels “half-pity, half-scorn” (V. 82) toward Madame’s “rul[e] by espionage” (V. 81). Lucy explains that the very atmosphere of Rue Fossette is
constantly under watch, letting her readers see how deep inside an anti-home she has been trapped. She, consequently, undergoes self-division, like she does after leaving Bretton and reaching Miss Marchmont’s house. This happens most prominently when Madame Beck asks her to teach a classroom of “sixty pupils” (V. 84). At first, Lucy becomes highly apprehensive of the number of students she will have to face perhaps because she anticipates that her anonymity will be compromised sixty folds. “[W]ith my usual base habit of cowardice, I shrunk into my sloth, like a snail into its shell, and alleged incapacity and impracticability as a pretext to escape action” (84), she inwardly states. Immersed into the anti-self, Lucy, therefore, tries to hold on to the only material object she finds – her thimble and needle – because carrying on her work will allow her to remain in the room alone rather than face sixty students. However, Madame Beck, taking Lucy’s hand, makes her abandon every object, and drags her in front of the classroom door. “She paused, dropped my hand, faced, and scrutinized me” (85), Lucy somberly tells her readers as she begins to cry. “I was flushed, tremulous from head to toe […] I believe I was crying” (85), she says. While Lucy, upon encountering an anti-home, typically undergoes self-division and attaches herself to material objects to escape back to self, this scene confirms her need for such escape because unable to do either and being scrutinized in addition, Lucy breaks down. Reflecting on Lucy’s emotional state at the school and the nature of the space, Boone states that she encounters an “enclosure[e] that mark[s] Lucy’s precarious negotiation of the competing paths of desire and duty, of expression and repression” (26). Incapable of any action, caught by duty and repressed, Lucy witnesses the complicated nature of the anti-home that Madame Beck brings. She states,

58 Boone compares Rue Fossette to Michael Foucault’s “carceral society” (22)
Power of a particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits, and that power was not my kind of power: neither sympathy, nor congeniality, nor submission, were the emotions it awakened. I stood—not soothed, nor won, nor overwhelmed. It seemed as if a challenge of strength between opposing gifts was given, and I suddenly felt all the dishonour of my diffidence—all the pusillanimity of my slackness to aspire (86).

In such fashion, the anti-home overpowers Lucy and she capitulates. She becomes compelled to embrace her anti-self completely and enter the classroom to teach. “I know […] I shall make blunders that will lay me open to the scorn of the most ignorant,” she confesses, “Still I mean to give the lesson” (86), Lucy admits. Although Lucy teaches the class successfully, securing a permanent job because of it, Madame Beck spies Lucy’s teaching the entire period, forcing her to remain in her anti-self the entire time. Unsurprisingly, Lucy ends the narration of that chapter with an account of the injustice in her new salary. She states,

From that day I ceased to be nursery governess, and became English teacher.

Madame raised my salary; but she got thrice the work out of me she had extracted from Mr. Wilson, at half the expense (89).

As Lucy’s days at the Rue Fossette pass, the anti-home intensifies. Describing it, she later states, “This was a strange house,” she describes, “where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine” (258). Although Lucy believes she gets along with the atmosphere of the school sufficiently, without material means to move toward the self, she weakens. Lucy loses her anonymity not only to Madame Beck’s spying eyes, but also to Ginevra Fanshaw, who attends Rue Fossette as a student and forces her company to Lucy. Lucy experiences the failing of her patience and the flagging of her interest when Ginevra speaks (V. 95). “Try to get a clear idea of
the state of your mind. To me, it seems in a great mess – chaotic as a rag-bad” (100), she once even tells Ginevra out of frustration. Lucy weakens as time passes due to the constant looming of the anti-home and as a result, one day, after being subjected to yet another one of Madame’s investigations, Lucy breaks down. She expounds her state saying,

I never had felt so strange and contradictory an inward tumult as I felt for an hour that evening: soreness and laughter, and fire, and grief, shared my heart between them. I cried hot tears: not because Madame mistrusted me—I did not care twopence for her mistrust—but for other reasons. Complicated, disquieting thoughts broke up the whole repose of my nature. However, that turmoil subsided: next day I was again Lucy Snowe (132)

Confined in her anti-self with no means to escape, Lucy shows signs of clinical depression. “I thought no doctor could cure me” (V. 177), she tells Goton, the school cook, one time. “[M]y mind was ill” (228) she tells M. Paul at another, explaining her psychological state at Rue Fossette during the time of school’s summer vacation. Critics like Gretchen Braun, Nancy Mayor and Peel admit that Lucy Snowe’s character suffers depression in Villette. Dutta writes, while “Jane’s development into complete female identity is expressed through dreams, paintings, hallucinations, Lucy’s [is] through depression, illness” (2312). Similarly, Boone claims that Villette carries “immensely dark yet moving […] portrait of depression, deprivation, and rage” (36). As a result of a lack of “healthy outlet” (18) for any of her feelings, as Forsyth observes, Auerbach writes that during her days at the school, “Lucy Snowe [becomes] cut off even from the action of the story she herself is narrating, as Charlotte Bronte dives below circumstances to explore the sources and the workings of a deeply divided mind” (208). All these critics point to Lucy’s state of depression. In my observation, Lucy’s depression begins prominently when she
discovers Madame Beck inspecting her belongings yet again. Diving deep within her anti-self, Lucy comes back to her room, laughs expressively, and starts crying immediately after. Intriguingly, Lucy admits that she cries for a reason she can’t locate and not because of Madame Beck (132). Although the very next day Lucy reminds her readers that she was “again Lucy Snowe,” it is evident that by this point in the narrative, Lucy is no more sure who she really is. Hence, Lucy starts experiencing the loss of self even more profoundly. “A strange, frolicsome, noisy little world was this school” (140), she describes her anti-home. Eventually, Lucy begins to ascribe qualities to Rue Fossette found in the Catholic church. Vocalizing the school’s approach toward its pupils and other inhabitants, Lucy says, “‘Eat, drink, and live!’ [the school] says. ‘Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me. I hold their cure—guide their course: I guarantee their final fate’” (141). Evidently, Lucy herself experiences a loss of her soul to her anti-home along with a growing sense of misidentification. As Gilbert and Gubar state, she loses herself inside “the tomblike cell that is her mind” (406).

Lucy’s anti-self surges when M. Paul forces her to play the role of a man in their school play. At first, unsurprisingly to her readers, the very aspect of being on stage terrifies Lucy. “I gasped, horror-struck” (147), she says in explanation of her reaction when M. Paul asks her to take part “in the vaudeville” (147). Very soon, Lucy realizes that the part he asks her to play is that of a person of the opposite sex. She expresses,

A thousand objections rushed into my mind. The foreign language, the limited time, the public display… Inclination recoiled, Ability faltered, Self-respect (that ‘vile quality’) trembled. ‘Non, non, non!’ said all these; but looking up at M. Paul, and seeing in his vexed, fiery, and searching eye, a sort of appeal behind all its menace, my lips dropped the word ‘oui’ (148).
Like the incident in front of the classroom when Madame Beck forces Lucy to assume the anti-self and obey her, Lucy, despite ardently objecting to M. Paul’s proposal, is only able to concede. Despite her concession, M. Paul takes Lucy inside yet another sphere of entrapment. He locks her in the attic of the school for several hours to ensure she practices her part. The attic, then, arguably, becomes an anti-home within the anti-home. Inside, Lucy loses all desires of the body as well as the mind. Hungry for hours and not invested in any emotion, she rehearses (V. 150). In such scenes of concession to Madame Beck (in front of the classroom) and to M. Paul (in the attic), Lucy once again behaves like the selkie when she is on land. The selkie, in her fisherman’s house, despite recognizing it as her anti-home, is always a good wife. As Carole Silver notes in *Strange and Secret People*, fairy brides like the selkie are always “a docile wife and mother” (99). In fact, Silver explains that in any folktale, the fairy bride’s domestic role is depicted as “dreary, sometimes as close to slavery” (104). Talking about Croker’s tale of the mermaid bride, Silver notes that she is depicted as a “virtual servant to her husband” (104). Speaking of selkies in particular, MacRitchie writes, although they display a longing for the sea, they make very good housewives (5). Correspondingly, Lucy is always dissatisfied in her anti-home, but rarely defiant. In other words, Lucy delivers what the authoritative figures, the “school-autocrat[s]” (V. 170), of her anti-home, namely, Madame Beck and M. Paul, demand of her with mental, but no physical resistance. She calls herself “mechanically obedient” (178). As the selkie, a restless being but a good wife, silently searches for her skin in her anti-home, Lucy, too, searches for the material support to escape. On the other hand, as Lucy gets immersed into M. Paul’s direction, instead of being able to recognize her self and differentiate it from the anti-self that she always successfully does, Lucy loses herself, in words of Robyn R. Warhol, into the
“ambivalence about gender roles” (870). As a result, misidentification rather than self-division ensues. Ultimately, Lucy’s depression grows and leads to a point where she collapses altogether.

Anti-home grasps Lucy most powerfully in the chapter titled “The Long Vacation” in Villette. As the school closes for summer vacation, Lucy finds herself in a tussle with her own identity. The chapter begins with M. Paul’s affirmation that no matter how much Lucy attempts to conceal herself, she is an open book to her. He says,

You are one of those beings who must be kept down. I know you! I know you!

Other people in this house see you pass, and think that a colourless shadow has gone by.

As for me, I scrutinized your face once, and it sufficed (171)

Thus, in words of Boone, M. Paul once again undertakes “a gross violation of her privacy” (34). As the vacation begins, the teachers as well as the pupils take leave and not having a home to return to, Lucy finds herself isolated in Rue Fossette. She states,

My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! How gloomy the forsaken garden—grey now with the dust of a town summer departed. Looking forward at the commencement of those eight weeks, I hardly knew how I was to live to the end (173)

It is in this chapter, and particularly through this passage, that Bronte differentiates between isolation and anonymity. As argued before, Lucy desires to remain unidentified, but doesn’t attempt to live a life without social interaction and conversations. “My spirits had long been gradually sinking” (173), she admits to her looming depression, and knowing that material means would have been able to uplift her, she laments their lack stating, “now that the prop of employment was withdrawn, [my spirits] went down fast” (173). Explicating her despair, she
adds, “[a] sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed on me—a despairing resignation to
reach betimes the end of all things earthly” (173). Isolated, Lucy then turns to her readers to test
her strength and makes an attempt to boasts an unrecognizability from them. She writes,

   Religious reader, you will preach to me a long sermon about what I have just
written, and so will you, moralist: and you, stern sage: you, stoic, will frown; you, cynic,
sneer; you, epicure, laugh. Well, each and all, take it your own way. I accept the sermon,
frown, sneer, and laugh; perhaps you are all right: and perhaps, circumstanced like me,
you would have been, like me, wrong (173)

Suffering yet a “want of companionship” (V. 175), Lucy ventures outside the Rue
Fossette and “walk[s] all day” (175). She suffers sleeplessness and impatience follows (176).
She even begins to see herself living at the verge of insanity. Lucy admits that while on some
days she is “delirious” (177), on others, she has a “sane mind” (177). Badowska writes that in
these chapters, the novel “challenges the boundaries of [Lucy’s] subjectivity” (1513). In an utter
need of company, Lucy, an ardent Protestant, enters a Catholic church. Reaching the
confessional, she describes her reasons of entering the church to the priest:

   I said, I was perishing for a word of advice or an accent of comfort. I had been
living for some weeks quite alone; I had been ill’ I had a pressure of affliction on my
mind of which it would hardly longer endure the weight (178)

59 Speaking of Lucy’s troubled state during the vacation, Gilbert and Gubar write, “Bronte explores not the
redemptive but the destructive effect of the buried life on women who can neither escape by retreating into the self
(since such a retreat is rejected as solipsistic) nor find a solution by dehumanizing the other into a spiritual object
(403)
Lucy shares her need to communicate, thus. When the priest asks her to visit again, inwardly, Lucy responds that she wouldn’t. Explaining Lucy’s decision to not return despite the priest’s request, Briganti explains,

Attendance on the cretin implies daily intercourse with a mind estranged from itself, living in perennial exile, a totalizing image of such power that gazing upon it causes Lucy mental agony (14)

Soon after, Lucy declares, “I was lost” (180), implying that not only a loss of proper direction back to the school, but also a loss of self as a result of the snares of her insalubrious anti-home. “I seemed to pitch headlong down an abyss” (181), she says before fainting.

Facing, thus, a powerful anti-home, Lucy collapses at the end of Volume 1 in Villette. “The grip Villette has on Lucy,” observes Badowska, “is such that the only way for her to get ‘without the city walls’ is, it seems, by means of unconsciousness” (1514). The opening chapter of Volume 2 titled, “Auld Lang Syne” demonstrates how she recuperates by undergoing a severe self-division and by avidly connecting herself with material objects around her. Lying on a bed of a mysterious family who brings Lucy to their home after finding her unconscious in the streets of Villette, Lucy experiences her soul outside of her body, illustrating her ability to see her being in two identities when faced with an anti-home. Delineating a separate identity to her soul, Lucy admits that although she is unable to tell “where my soul went” (185), she guesses that it must have flown out of her body, “gone upward [toward] eternal home,” met with an angel of the heavens, and returned (V. 185). “I know she re-entered her prison in pain, with reluctance,

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60 Reflecting on this scene in her letter to Williams, Bronte writes in 1852, “[i]t was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional for instance—it was the semi-delirium of solitary ’grief and’ sickness” (Letters 80)

61 Helen M. Cooper, on a note to the title of the chapter, explains, “Literally ‘old times since,’ or old times fondly remembered, [auld lang syne is] a song sung on New Year’s Eve in some English-speaking countries, originating from Scotland, in which ‘olde acquaintance[s]’ are remembered and toasted” (586).
with a moan and a long shiver” (185), Lucy admits as she sees her soul as her *self* that flies unidentified, but becomes the *anti-self* when it re-enters her body. Lucy identifies her soul as the ‘Spirit’ and the body as the ‘Substance.’ She calls them “divorced mates” (185) as the self-division transpires. “They greeted each other, not in an embrace, but a racking sort of struggle” (185), she further explains, reminding us of Gaskell’s reading of Bronte’s conflict between the desire to be an author and the duty of be a daughter.62 Gradually, Lucy wakes up from her sleep and struggles to come to terms with the room she wakes up to.

Immediately after experiencing self-division, Lucy turns to the power of material objects to heal herself from her delirium. She immediately considers the interiority of the room: “at last I took in the complete fact of a pleasant parlour” (186), she says, soon adding “Where was I? Not only in what spot of the world, but in what year of our Lord? For all these objects were of past days” (187). Considering Lucy’s dependence on the material objects in this scene, Badowska writes, “[Lucy] recovers from nervous illness seemingly because she is able to see herself as a part of an assemblage of objects that evoke the past” (1513). Badowska claims that Lucy’s pleasant description of objects in the room make them equivalent to drugs (1514). Although Heather Glen and Badoska argue that Lucy becomes “a sort of museum object” (1515) in this scene, identifying herself as an object and thus, a part of the room, rather than a subject, I argue that Lucy wakes up because of the strength these objects provide her, and not because she becomes one herself.63 Eventually, Lucy realizes that the interior of the parlour helps her recover because they belong to a place where she felt her first *home* in the novel – the Bretton’s.

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62 I discuss this in page 26

63 Heather Glen writes, “self is experienced less as subject than an object” (226)
residing in Villette, Mrs. Bretton and Graham Bretton nurse Lucy to recovery in their house, La Terrasse.

In La Terrasse, Lucy finds a momentary home as she regains her self temporarily living with the old inhabitants of Bretton. She returns to her unidentified, anonymous self of Bretton as Mrs. Bretton and Graham (who is now Dr. John in the novel) confess that they were unable to recognize her. It is Lucy who reveals herself and admits that she had always recognized Dr. John as Graham Bretton and deliberately concealed her own identity from him. “[U]pon my honour, often as I have seen you, I never once suspected this fact” (197), Dr. John admits his failure to recognize Lucy even after having seen her and conversed with her for months in Rue Fossette. Living in La Terrasse with her god-relations, Lucy also rejoices the lack of scrutiny. Instead of inspecting her, like Madame Beck and M. Paul frequently do in the school, Mrs. Bretton and Dr. John allow Lucy to retire to her own way of living. This is demonstrated when Dr. John excitedly asks Lucy if she had recognized him as Graham Bretton all along and not confided her knowledge to him deliberately. When he learns that she had, he refrains from further inquiry, only thinking her “eccentric” (198). Lucy is so content at La Terrasse that after saying her prayers and knowing that such happiness could only be impermanent, she cries once again (199). Upon her return to Rue Fossette after the end of the summer vacation that she spends at La Terrasse, Lucy experiences the anti-self once again.

Witnessing a mysterious apparition, Lucy fears an exposure of her deepest thoughts, a condition that once again reminds her that Rue Fossette is her anti-home. A legend that Lucy recognizes as a “romantic rubbish” (118) perfuses the grounds of the school that speaks of “a vague tale [...] of a black and white nun” (117). In the garden of Rue Fossette that had previously belonged to a convent, a young nun had been “buried alive for some sin against her
vow” (V. 117), Lucy recalls learning. However, after undergoing severe psychological stress and discomfort while at Rue Fossette, Lucy begins seeing “the ghostly Nun of the garden” (V. 149) inside the school building. On her first encounter with the nun, Lucy writes,

Say what you will, reader—tell me I was nervous or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that letter; declare that I dreamed; this I vow—I saw there—in that room—on that night—an image like—a NUN (273)

Seeing the image, Lucy cries and runs to Madame Beck’s sitting-room. Later on, when Dr. John attempts to construe what really transpired, he convinces Lucy of his conclusion that she had imagined rather than seen the nun. Dr. John says,

You are in a highly nervous state […] you saw, or thought you saw, some appearance peculiarly calculated to impress the imagination […] Be calm now. This is all a matter of the nerves (277)

Lucy becomes additionally vulnerable hearing Dr. John’s inference of the event. She experiences an anti-self as she understands that not only has her body and possessions been inspected, but now, her mind has been revealed as well. Christina Crosby claims that while Dr. John regards the nun as an entity existing within her, it can be “read as both, a phantom separate from her and as an image of her troubled self, a phantasm within” (705). However, Crosby proposes a third reading of the nun. She writes,

[W]e wonder whether the ghost is inside or outside Lucy’s brain. […] Bronte’s psychological realism, however, allows for a third possibility: the nun is metaphorically representative of Lucy’s fragmented self, first inside, then outside: inside when Lucy is racked with internal conflicts, outside when she is more in control of herself (705)
Providing such interpretation, Crosby corroborates my attempt to find an interconnection between Lucy’s experience of the nun and her experience of the *anti-home*. As substantiated before, when Lucy realizes the clasp of the *anti-home*, she reassures herself of the presence of her true *self* and therefore, understands that her being has been divided. Crosby explains this divide by arguing that when Lucy is unconfident of herself, she thinks the ghost of the nun has subjugated her mind, however, when she is ready to leave her *anti-home* at the end of the novel, Lucy understands that the ghost of the nun has always existed outside of her. Crosby writes, “[a]nd she is more in control by the end of her narrative, thus the decisiveness of Lucy’s apparent discovery of the truth under the veil, outside herself” (705). Hence, Crosby authenticates the understanding that the nun’s appearance further complicates Lucy’s sense of self.

Undergoing what Crosby calls the “fragmented self,” Lucy turns to the only material object that can help her escape her *anti-self*: Dr. John’s letter. The letter stands out as a material object so profoundly that upon receiving it, Lucy even materializes joy. She calls the letter “a morsel of real solid joy: not a dream, not an image of the brain” (266). It is this object that Lucy fervently looks for immediately following her encounter with the apparition. When she brings Madame Beck and company back to the attic where she had seen the nun, Lucy forgets about the ghost that made her panic, and as a result, starts panicking in her search for the letter. “‘My letter! my letter!,’” she exclaims and states that she “panted and plained, almost beside myself. I groped on the floor, wringing my hands wildly” (274). Eventually, upon finding it, Lucy displays an extraordinary faith in the materiality of the object. Deciding to preserve it from any spying eyes, therefore, Lucy goes to a broker’s shop to buy a metal box. Wrapping her letter on a silk cloth and inserting it inside the box making it air-tight, Lucy brings the letter back to the school.

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64 It is revealed later that the nun was de Hamal, a suitor of Ginevra Fanshaw, in disguise.
(V. 328). Taking it then to a pear-tree on the outer grounds of Rue Fossette, she buries the box. Doing so, Lucy evidences her perception that sometimes, the matter is more powerful than the mind as the preservation of the former can soothe the latter. John Hughes claims that the burial episode “suggest[s] the temporal displacement and incarceration of feeling” (722) suggesting Lucy’s transferal of emotion into something solid and material that can be contained and thus, physically preserved.

Through Lucy’s acknowledgment of and dependence in material means to escape the anti-home, Bronte evidently makes a case for women requiring their share of property to gain emancipation in nineteenth-century England. Although Married Woman’s Property Act comes to existence in 1882, nearly three decades after Bronte’s death in 1855, women authors of the early nineteenth-century England such as Jane Austen often address the social condition where single as well as married women were entirely dependent on a male relative’s wealth to survive financially. Before the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882, once married, women in England were incapable of independently owning a property. In *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, William Blackstone writes in 1765,

> By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; [...] and her condition during her marriage is called her *couverte* (442)

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65 Married Women’s Property Act enabled married women in Britain to own, buy, and sell property independent of her husband
Candida Ann Lacey further explains this *coverture* in her biography of Barbara Bodichon. Describing the condition for women Bodichon relentlessly worked to change, Lacey writes,

A man and a wife are one person in law; the wife loses all her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband. He is civilly responsible for her acts; she lives under his protection or cover, and her condition is called *coverture* (25)

If married women suffered at the hands of legal inequality, widows suffered even further. Cynthia Curran explains how widowhood came with inescapable suffering beyond the emotional agony of losing a loved one. For a woman in the nineteenth century England, widowhood brought “continuing refrains of lack of money, a sense of not belonging and an unwilling dependence” (217), Curran writes. Jane Austen portrays the desolation in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) through the character of Mrs. Dashwood. Following her husband’s death, Mrs. Dashwood’s *coverture* disallows her any property and as a result, she gets “degraded to the condition of visitors” (SS. 6) in her own home. Reflecting on the role of a Victorian man, Curran states, “the Victorian husband and father was expected to provide for the material survival and comfort of his dependent wife and children [therefore] insuring the breadwinner would be of vital importance” (220).

Bronte, from an early age, was ardently opposed to the idea of women’s dependency. She illustrates this in a letter she writes to Henry Nussey in 18--,

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66 Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891) was an English woman’s rights activist. Her work, *Brief Summary of the Laws of England concerning Women* (1854) focused on married women’s property ownership. She and her fellow social activists held regular meetings during the 1850s in a building called Langham Place. The group and the place together was later known as ‘The Ladies of Langham Place’
The wife who brings riches to her husband sometimes also brings an idea of her own importance and a tenacity about what she conceives to be her rights little calculated to produce happiness in the married state – Most probably she will wish to control where Nature and Affection bind her to submit (Letter 204)

A keen advocate, thus, for female subjectivity and independency, Bronte carried a special reverence for employed women, evidencing her knowledge on the perils women dependent on male relatives for livelihood faced. Detectably, this reverence branches from the dire necessity faced by the Bronte family following the harmful and self-degrading lifestyle adopted by Branwell, the eldest of the Bronte siblings. In Life, Gaskell explains how Branwell, the family’s most promising child, engaged in a relationship with a married woman, making the match not only a socially unsanctioned one, but also one that induced him to fall prey to substance abuse. Gaskell writes that in 1845, “[t]he black gloom hung over what had once been the brightest hope of the family – over Branwell and the mystery in which his wayward conduct was enveloped” (274). Citing Bronte’s journal, Gaskell explains how Branwell’s misdemeanors encouraged Bronte to undertake a profession on her own (270). Bronte and her sisters’ attempt to employ themselves begin with a plan of opening a school and continue with the decision to publish their poetry and eventually, their prose. However, their (especially Bronte’s) comprehension of the impending difficulties that lay before a single woman enabled them to continually remain employed. Smith explains Bronte’s veneration for independent women by citing the high regard Bronte had for her former teacher, Margaret Wooler. Bronte maintained a cordial relationship with Wooler all her life as she respected her, writes Smith, “for the independence she achieved through her hard-working career in teaching” (228). Smith further explains how Bronte

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67 In her 1845 journal, Bronte writes, “I have seriously entered into the enterprise of keeping a school” (Life 270).
immortalizes Wooler through Mrs Pryor of Shirley (1849). Writing to the same Miss Wooler in 1846, Bronte explains her stance on the issue of single women needing employment. She writes, “there is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman, who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly, without support of husband or brother” (Life 290).

Similarly, in a letter to Williams written in the summer of 1849, Bronte congratulates her publisher on his daughter, Louisa’s, admission to Queen’s College. She calls the admission “a step towards independency” and writes,

Your daughters – no more than your sons – should be a burden on your hands: your daughters – as much as your sons – should aim at making their way honourably through life. Do not wish to keep them at home. Believe me […] the girl who stays at home doing nothing is worse off than the hardest-wrought and worst paid drudge of a school. Whenever I have seen […] families of daughters sitting and waiting to be married, I have pitied them from my heart. It is doubtless well – very well – if Fate decrees them a happy marriage – but if otherwise – give their existence some object – their time some occupation – or the peevishness of disappointment and the listlessness of idleness will infallibly degrade their nature (Letters 226)

Unsurprisingly, Bronte creates powerful heroines in all her female centric fiction who are either employed (like Jane) or property owners (like Jane, Shirley, and later, Lucy) to showcase the interrelation between women’s happiness and material wealth. Hence, in Villette as well, Bronte continues to present her conviction that to free herself from the anti-self and reach home, a woman requires material support. Consequently, Lucy is always looking for one.

68 In Letters, quoting from Chapter 12 of Shirley, Smith states, “[Bronte] gave some of her characteristics to Mrs Pryor who filled ‘with such quiet independency a very dependent post’” (228).
Bronte’s regard for the idea of interconnecting women and wealth is so high that in *Villette*, nearly every female character who appears in the narrative is introduced by the narrator in relation to her financial status. Of Mrs. Bretton, Lucy says,

My godmother lived in a handsome house in the clean and ancient town of Bretton. Her husband's family had been residents there for generations, and bore, indeed, the name of their birthplace—Bretton of Bretton (7)

Of Polly, disregarding her age and criticizing her dependency, Lucy writes,

One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now that her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham, and seemed to feel by his feelings: to exist in his existence (29)

Gilbert and Gubar further elaborate on Lucy’s criticism of Polly stating, “Lucy feel[s] contemptuous of six-year-old Polly’s need for love and male protection” (403). Aside from Mrs. Bretton and Polly, Lucy continues to introduce women in relation to their properties. Just as Lucy introduces Mrs. Bretton and her house in the same breath, she presents the account of Miss Marchmont in a similar fashion. The very first lines dedicated to the old lady state, “Miss Marchmont was a woman of fortune, and lived in a handsome residence (40). Lucy takes her formula of introducing a woman a step further when she first mentions the name of Madame Beck. Right before the reader reads Madame’s name in the novel, they read the name of the property she owns. In a single sentence, the narrator writes, “‘Pensionnat de Demoiselles’ was the inscription; and beneath, a name, ‘Madame Beck.’” (71).^{69} While Lucy maintains respect for

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^{69} While I analyze Lucy’s representation of women in relation to their property, Auerbach sees how Bronte, especially in the case of introducing Mrs. Bretton, mixes the person with the place. She writes, “‘Bretton of Bretton’: the concord between person and place is so firm that the names are interchangeable” (204)
Mrs. Bretton, Miss Marchmont, and even Madame Beck, Lucy openly disdains women who are dependent and carry no determination to break away from such dependency. For instance, the very first time the reader is introduced to Ginevra Fanshawe, the girl imprudently criticizes Lucy’s attempt to earn a living herself by stating the unnecessity of a job in her life as she is supported first, by her godfather, and will be in future by her husband. To her readers, speaking of her decision to leave England, Lucy states, “I had left my own country, intent on extending my knowledge, and gaining my bread” (72). However, to the prospect of earning one’s own bread, Ginevra says,

Bah! how unpleasant! But I know what it is to be poor: they are poor enough at home—[…] my uncle and godpapa De Bassompierre […] is the only one that helps us: he educates us girls. […] By-and-by we are to marry—rather elderly gentlemen, I suppose, with cash […] Now, this is better than 'earning a living,' as you say (61)

Months later, when the same Ginevra accuses Lucy of carrying secret jealously toward her social position and asks what Lucy would give to become her, Lucy boldly replies, “Not a bad sixpence […] You are but a poor creature” (160). Hence, Lucy’s impression on the other women characters of *Villette* is guided by their level of independency. While she respects the women who are able to support themselves, she disregards girls like Ginevra, and later, even Mrs. Walravens, who are “entirely supported” (V. 435). Such portrayal of women characters, therefore, validates my assertion that through Lucy, Bronte means to suggest that to reach home, a woman must display a regard for owning a part of the material world.

Not only does Bronte depict a heroine who seeks to connect to the material world and appreciates the dependency of the mind on the matter, Bronte makes her highly proprietorial of her possessions as well. Such possessiveness of belongings reminds one, undoubtedly, of the
selkie’s love for her skin. As the fisherman hides her skin to circumscribe her on land, the selkie becomes highly sorrowful of her loss. Correspondingly, although Lucy always finds the possessions that she momentarily loses, despite otherwise being an evasive narrator, Lucy describes the loss and the impending discovery of her possessions avidly in all cases. The first possession she loses in the narrative is her trunk with the green ribbon after reaching the port of Labassecour from London. As a result, Lucy experiences a considerable loss of her identity. Gilbert and Gubar explain this stating, “[o]n her arrival in Labassecour Lucy is stripped of even the few objects and attributes she possesses. Her keys, her trunk, her money, and her language are equally useless” (407). She considers her trunk “small matter but enough important to me” and realizes herself that she has been “over eager about it” (67). Fixating her eyes on the “part of the vehicle in which [she] had seen [her] little portmanteau safely stowed” (67), Lucy waits considerably for her trunk. Although she spends the night thinking she has lost it, Lucy finds her trunk the very next day. However, upon reaching Rue Fossette with it, the trunk undergoes another form of loss when Madame Beck inspects its contents to her full capacity. The second possession Lucy momentarily loses is Dr. John’s letter. Kelly reads Lucy’s obsession with his letter as her attempt to “reaffirm her connection to a pleasant childhood memory” (351). She even compares it to the “nourishing and salubrious meat” a hunter obtains after a painstaking hunt. As a result, as discussed, her obsession and possessiveness of the letter impels her to preserve it through actual burial. Lucy’s fondness of her belongings is evident one more time when she wins a cigar casket and Dr. John a lady’s head-dress at the concert they attend. When Dr. John asks to exchange their rewards, Lucy narrates,
He was excessively anxious to make an exchange; but I could not be brought to hear reason, and to this day I keep my cigar-case: it serves, when I look at it, to remind me of old times, and one happy evening (248)

It seems, thus, apt that Bronte’s original choice of title for \textit{Villette} was ‘Choseville,’ which translated from French to English means, ‘Thing City.’ As much as the novel depicts a woman’s psychological journey, it depicts her relationship with the things around her as keenly.

As Bronte sets to provide a happy-ending to her independent heroine, at the end of the novel, Lucy becomes the headmistress of the school. Recognizing Lucy as Bronte’s “most independent heroine,” Davis writes, “[Lucy] actively seeks her own position, educates herself, and maintains and expands the school [becoming] At the end of her tale […] a single, successful business person” (202). Praising Lucy’s ability to remain authoritative of her life despite losing her sole companion, Auerbach states,

Lucy’s lover dies: naturally she must be alienated and powerless. Now I find her quite powerful, professionally and politically, and undoubtedly exultant, at the end. […] At that time […] it was not usual to define fictional heroines in terms of power (xv)

However, as I have verified, for Bronte, power equals independency for women. For that reason, despite Lucy suggests that M. Paul is lost in the sea, Bronte doesn’t give her heroine a helpless fate in the end of the novel. In words of Warhol, “Even if one assumes that M. Paul does not return, the ending is happy […]” (870). Hence, in the end, Lucy finds the material object that will grant her freedom from Rue Fossette, just like the selkie finds her skin to escape her anti-

home.

Although both the selkie and Lucy find their \textit{home}, the process by which Lucy does reiterates Bronte’s closing of \textit{Jane Eyre}. Just like Jane discovers in Rochester the same animality
she herself is always looking to embrace, Lucy discovers in M. Paul the same desire for ‘incognito’ that she herself wishes to live with. Hence, Bronte’s heroines find that their self and the self of their companions are the same. M. Paul illustrates this in a passionate monologue where he provides a detailed account of his and Lucy’s similarities:

> I knew it [...] I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike [...] Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine—that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star (407)

Previous to this declaration of similarities, Lucy and M. Paul experience multiple clash of thoughts and “crabbed dialogue[s].” M. Paul, understanding Lucy’s opinion of him, one day declares,

> For you I am neither a man nor a Christian. You see me void of affection and religion, unattached by friend or family, unpiloted by principle or faith. It is well, Mademoiselle; such is our reward in this life (447)

To this account, Lucy responds, “[y]ou are a philosopher, Monsieur; a cynic philosopher” (447). However, it is upon her visit to Mrs. Walravens that she learns of M. Paul’s past. Pere Silas of Holy Church tells her about the tragic tale of Justine Marie, M. Paul’s finance, who died “in her noviciate” (V. 435). Lucy learns that although Justine Marie’s grandmother, Mrs. Walravens, had opposed their match, after Justine’s death, when the Walravens family faced a financial ruin, M. Paul “came with singular devotedness to the rescue” (V. 435). Pere Silas further narrates, “[M. Paul] took on their insolent pride the revenge of the purest charity—
housing, caring for, befriending them, so as no son could have done it more tenderly and efficiently” (435). Learning of M. Paul’s charitable nature and inherent goodness, Lucy exclaims inwardly,

‘How often,’ murmured I to myself, ‘has this man, this M. Emanuel, seemed to me to lack magnanimity in trifles, yet how great he is in great things!’ […] I own I did not reckon amongst the proofs of his greatness […] this man, Emanuel, seemed of the best; touched with superstition, influenced by priestcraft, yet wondrous for fond faith, for pious devotion, for sacrifice of self […] (438-9)

In such fashion, Lucy realizes that M. Paul had been practicing anonymity in the same capacity Lucy had been desiring it.

Lucy finds the equivalent to the selkie’s skin in form of her school. She shares her dream of opening a school to M. Paul and upon him inquiring how she plans to execute her dream, Lucy says, “I was doing my best to save what would enable me to put it in practice” (533). Soon after, M. Paul buys a cottage and asks Lucy to open her school there. However, Lucy agrees to be the “faithful steward” (V. 537) of the school as a headmistress until he returns from his three-year trip to the West Indies. After M. Paul’s departure, in the next three years, Lucy’s school prospers. Upon finding back her self, she expresses, “The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart” (544). Like a selkie finds her home and self in the sea where she lives with the fond memories of her husband in land, Lucy finds her

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70 Of her intention to open a school, Lucy once states, “When I shall have saved one thousand francs, I will take a tenement with one large room, and two or three smaller ones, furnish the first with a few benches and desks, a black tableau, an estrade for myself; upon it a chair and table, with a sponge and some white chalks; begin with taking day-pupils, and so work my way upwards. Madame Beck’s commencement was—as I have often heard her say—from no higher starting-point, and where is she now? All these premises and this garden are hers, bought with her money; she has a competency already secured for old age, and a flourishing establishment under her direction, which will furnish a career for her children” (400)
home in the school “M. Paul had chosen” and despite never reuniting with him, she spends the rest of her days content. Breen writes, “Ironically, the testimony of M. Paul’s love for Lucy is his separation from her” (250). Similarly, Auerbach notes, “Charlotte Bronte […] venture[s] into an unchartered world in [her] delineations of governing women whose self-definitions come from their freedom from family” (6). Possibly, M. Paul never returns because despite carrying great love and respect for Lucy, he remains one of those characters who nurture Lucy’s anti-self in the novel and Bronte believes in fostering Lucy’s self without him than cultivating her anti-self with him. Hence, in Villette, even though Bronte presents, in words of Gilbert and Gubar, “the most terrifying account of female deprivation ever written” (400), having the husband-figure absent from the closing of such account, Bronte signifies her conviction that “even ‘a lone woman’ can be happy” (Life 290). Being home, therefore, Lucy undertakes no self-division in the novel’s denouement. Instead, a letter from M. Paul reminds the readers that she embraces her inner self completely. “Remain a Protestant,” he tells her, “There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for ‘Lucy’” (545), he graciously admits. Hence, Bronte ensures that Lucy remains Lucy in her truest self.

4 COMMUNITY AND ANTI-COMMUNITY: CAROLINE’S SOCIETY

I’ll borrow of imagination what reality will not give me - Charlotte Bronte, Shirley

In 1847, following the publication of Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte started drafting her next work, a novel that was later to become Shirley. In 1848, Shirley’s composition coincided with two tragic events that occurred in the Bronte household – the deaths of Branwell and Emily Bronte in September and December respectively. In May of 1849, Bronte witnessed the death of her final surviving sibling, Anne Bronte. In September of 1849, Shirley was published. While
scholars widely claim that the deaths unfavorably affected the quality of the novel, in such biographical criticism, many have failed to consider a rather crucial detail – how the novel’s composition favorably affected the nature of Bronte’s mourning. When this is taken into consideration, *Shirley*, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, reveals newer facets of Bronte’s feminist approach to life. I argue that writing a novel in a state of forced solitude shaped Bronte’s perception on society’s role in fostering an individualistic female mind.

Bronte’s letters tell us that writing *Shirley* at the time of family tragedy was not an obligation of any kind, but means of emotional support and strength. Speaking about this, she writes to her publisher, William S. Williams, in September of 1849,

> The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking three months ago, its active exercise has kept my head above water since … I am thankful to god who gave me the faculty (*Letters* 261).

Elizabeth Gaskell, Bronte’s biographer who was also a friend, elaborates on this experience in *Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857). She writes,

> Branwell died, - after him Emily, - after her Anne; - the pen, laid down when there were three sisters living and loving was taken up when one alone remained … She went on with her work steadily … she wrote on, struggling against her own feelings of illness; (380-1).

According to biographer Winifred Gerin, writing *Shirley* helped Bronte overcome this very struggle. “It [*Shirley*] represented the life-line that brought her into harbor after shipwreck” (390), Gerin states.\(^7^1\) Alongside Bronte’s own admission, while biographers like Gaskell and Gerin note how the practice of writing affected Bronte’s mourning, critics notice the two primary

\(^7^1\) In 1967, Gerin writes *Charlotte Bronte: The Evolution of Genius*, the first modern biography of Charlotte Bronte after Gaskell’s *Life*, which was written immediately after Bronte’s death.
effects Bronté’s mourning had in *Shirley*: (a) Bronte transferred characters and objects from her own life to *Shirley’s* narrative and (b) *Shirley* became a novel abundant in characters and scenes, but lacking in unity and coherence. Scholars have universally observed how Bronte transfers many character traits of people she knew into the characters in her novel; traits especially from people whom she knew in the years surrounding Branwell, Emily, and Anne’s deaths.\(^{72}\) In a recent study titled *The Bronte Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (2015), Deborah Lutz finds that in addition to real-life characters, Bronte also transfers her personal belongings to the narrative, immortalizing them in her fiction.\(^{73}\) While *Shirley* is infused with elements from Bronté’s own life (from characters to animals to objects), Gaskell states that the plot remains entirely fictional. She writes, “In ‘Shirley’ she [Bronte] took the idea of most of her characters from life although the incidents and situations were, of course, fictitious” (378). However, critics often claim that *Shirley*, compared to *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), struggles to find unity and rationality primarily because its composition was not assisted, but rather interrupted by life events. In words of Helene Moglen, “Three deaths in nine months. Three times the writing had been interrupted – three times resumed in an increasing mood of hopelessness and despair” (157). Moglen states that as a result of such interruption, *Shirley* suffers from multiple levels of disunities. Bronte’s contemporaries believed the same. Following its publication, in 1850, G. H. Lewis writes in *Edinburgh Review*,

> [I]n *Shirley* all unity, in consequence of defective art, is wanting. There is no passionate link; nor there is any artistic fusion, or intergrowth, by which one part evolves

\(^{72}\) Gaskell writes that Bronte originally modeled Shirley and Caroline after Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey. However, following the deaths of her sisters, as a tribute to them, she transformed Caroline to match with Anne and Shirley to match with Emily. Biographers like Gerin and Margaret Smith attest the similarities.

\(^{73}\) Lutz describes how Bronte’s needlework box, Emily’s dog (Keeper), Keeper’s collar, Branwell’s walking stick, as well as Maria’s lock of hair find their place in Bronte’s novels, especially in *Shirley*. 
itself from another. [...] The various scenes are gathered up [...] they have not grown into a work (159).

However, in 1857, Gaskell maintains that Bronte “tried to make her novel like a piece of actual life” (379). As a scholar reading the novel almost two centuries hence, I am intrigued by Bronte’s possible intention behind writing Shirley with such curious blend of fact and fiction. Writing in such a fragile state and at an emotional stage of life, what did Bronte try to convey to her readers through the novel? What was her message? Is Shirley really disembodied as critics specify, or is there a binding thread that helms all events and characters together? These questions inaugurate the arguments of this chapter.

That Shirley is about the nineteenth-century ‘woman question’ is certain, and therefore, the starting point of my critical search for Bronte’s feminist message through the novel. When Williams asks Bronte about the topic of her next novel following the success of Jane Eyre, she responds, “I often wish to say something about the ‘condition of women’ question” (Letters 66), indicating as well as verifying her interest in the subject. However, in the same letter, she also inserts a disclaimer stating the topic has been taken up by authors so many times already and in such intensity that she feels a kind of “repugnance” to approach it.74 However, just like Drew Lamonica claims in We Are Three Sisters (2003) that Bronte engages the topic in Shirley despite the disclaimer, I argue that in addition to it, Bronte also introduces a unique standpoint on the ‘woman question:’ a woman’s individualism and social growth requires support from her community. I argue that after losing her siblings, especially Emily and Anne, Bronte realizes the

74 Although Bronte goes on to state that she feels a repugnance toward the topic because so much of “can’t” has been said about it, critics like Drew Lamonica confirm that despite implying that she might not, Bronte does touch upon the woman question in Shirley. In We Are Three Sisters: Self and Family in the Writing of the Brontes, Lamonica writes, “[d]espite this disclaimer, Shirley says quite a bit about the condition of women” (27).
instrumental role an educated and equally compassionate group or society plays toward the intellectual development of a female mind. For that reason, she makes Shirley’s heroine (Caroline Helstone) journey across numerous social, religious, and political groups (that are strikingly disconnected from each other) to finally have her heroine find home amid people (Shirley Keeldar, Robert Moore, and Mrs. Pryor) who respect and nourish her literary and intellectual sentiments. These people form, what I call, Caroline’s community, a society that Bronte found in the company of Emily and Anne, and rediscovered, after their deaths, in the company of Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell.

Bronte’s 1849 correspondences verify that what she missed most about Emily and Anne was their ability to comprehend, nourish, and challenge her intellectual endeavors. Following Anne’s demise, Bronte writes to Williams sharing her struggle to subsist in a town with little educated societies. In July of 1849, she writes, “Lonely as I am … How should I be with youth past – sisters lost – a resident in a moorland parish where there is not a single educated family?” (Letters 227). In September, to the same reader, she continues sharing her sorrow on losing her sisters, writing, “The two human beings who understood me and whom I understood are gone” (Letters 260). Despite sharing a close bond with Branwell in their childhood, Bronte clearly suggests – a critical detail – that she misses her sisters more than she longs for her brother. When Bronte does write to Williams about Branwell, she emphasizes more on the loss of an intelligent mind than on the fact that she lost a loving brother:

… and now to behold the sudden early obscure close of what might have been a noble career. I do not weep from a sense of bereavement – there is no prop withdrawn, no consolation torn away, no dear companion lost – but for the wreck of talent, the ruin of
promise, the untimely dreary extinction of what might have been a burning and a shining light (*Letters* 122).

Clearly, Bronte mourns the passing away of Branwell’s potential literary career the most. In their adulthood, Bronte and her brother became emotionally distant not only because he fell into alcoholism, but also because he had resigned himself from her shared literary practices. On the other hand, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne became more than siblings; they became a literary group. Gaskell explains how Bronte’s sisters contributed to her writing by detailing how Bronte felt after losing them,

… it was dreary to write without any one to listen to the progress of her tale, - to find fault or to sympathise, while pacing the length of the parlour in the evenings, as in the days that were no more. Three sisters had done this, - then two, the other sister dropping off from the walk, - and now one was left desolate, to listen for echoing steps that never came (381)

Hence, time and again, Bronte’s letter as well as Gaskell’s account of her life suggest that Bronte missed a society that not only shared her intellect, but nourished it as well. She missed her, in words of Helen Taylor, “writers’ workshop and closest friends” (87) the most.

In chapters 1 and 2, each a separate study of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, I explicate Charlotte Bronte’s implication that for an individualistic female mind to live and prosper, she must seek a *home* that will grant her the space as well as the atmosphere to embrace her *self.*

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To briefly summarize the concepts that I introduce previously: in chapter 1, I claim that in every house featured in *Jane Eyre*, Bronte builds two kinds of spaces within them: a *home* that allows her heroine to embrace who she truly is and what she wants to do and an *anti-home* that discourages such individualistic desires and behaviors. In chapter 2, I elaborate on the theory of *home* and *anti-home* by introducing the concept of *self* and *anti-self.* I claim that as Lucy Snowe traverses different geographies in *Villette*, finding herself entrapped in several *anti-homes*, she successfully escapes each of them only because she carries a unique ability to realize that she has two selves: a *self* – who she really is and an *anti-self* – who society wants her to be and a role that women often wrongly internalize. I argue that through *Villette*, Bronte urges women to distinguish their *self* from *anti-self.*
I claim that writing *Shirley*, Bronte suggests that she also needs a *community*. For a woman, a *community* is a group of people who encourage her to live in her *self*; the *community* either builds her a *home* or helps her find one. Conversely, an *anti-community* is the group of people that enforces restraint, restricting her from exploring her subjective take of the world. While a *community* is influential for a woman’s intellectual growth, an *anti-community* is detrimental. I argue that Bronte fills *Shirley* with multiple, disconnected groups from all strata of society and several schools of thought because she intends to present social groups in these two possibilities. She fills her novel with Whigs, Tories, the rich, the poor, the middle-class, the religious, the non-religious, old maids, and other such groups not because she wants to show a connection between them (as Lewis famously states she lacks), but because she wants to demonstrate how ultimately, what is important is which of the groups contribute to the growth of female subjectivity and empowerment and which don’t.

The disconnect that Lewis finds in *Shirley* has been recognized by generations of critics that have followed. Primarily, critics have noticed Bronte’s inability to decide if *Shirley* is an industrial novel or a romance. In 1979, Taylor explains,

> Bronte has created such a bewildering array of sub-plots, coincidences, irrelevant minor characters and rapid changes of tone that, not surprisingly, critics dismiss or demean it for its formal imperfections. Some forgive it for its lack of unity and for structural flaws because of the tragic circumstances in which it was written (84).

In agreement with Taylor, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state, “the problems faced by her [Bronte’s] heroines seem unrelated to the particular historical framework in which they are set” (395) as Caroline and Shirley’s romance with the Moore brothers is set against the 1811 Luddite riots of England. Similarly, Nancy Quick
Langer summarizes the collective critical frustration toward *Shirley*’s divided attention between industrial England and woman question by stating that the novel has “troubling inconsistencies” (276). However, in my understanding, the various incidents and characters of *Shirley* are to be connected not by political or social threads, but by Caroline Helstone’s journey. Caroline journeys across numerous groups and incidents by clearly displaying, at every point, how she reacts to them physically as well as psychologically. Clearly, it is Caroline who unifies everything that otherwise seems disconnected because the novels characters and events stand unified on the common platform of *community* and *anti-community*.

In addition to providing an original analysis of the novel, which I will demonstrate through a review of existing literature on *Shirley* shortly, I also present this chapter as a defense of *Shirley*’s infamous and vastly unpopular ending. Because I see the novel as a compatibility test between a woman and her society, my findings indicate, the marriage-plot at the close of the novel assists rather than challenges a feminist understanding of matrimony. In other words, with two marriages that conclude the story, Bronte clearly suggests that when a woman marries, she must marry within a *community* to ensure a continuation of *self* even after marriage. Furthermore, through the marriage-plot, Bronte illustrates that a woman’s *community* isn’t necessarily an all-female group; it is feminist, but not exclusively feminine. As the endings of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* demonstrate, for Bronte, a woman’s contentment doesn’t depend on her marital status.\(^{76}\) Instead, it depends on whether she finds a *home* and a *community* or not. To achieve that, in each of her women-centric novels, Bronte ensures that her men, if not already suitable for her heroines, undergo a reformation.\(^{77}\) When they succeed, like Edward Rochester

\(^{76}\) At the end of their respective narratives, while Jane Eyre is happily married to Edward Rochester, Lucy Snowe loses Paul Emanuel to a shipwreck.

\(^{77}\) Critics like Terry Eagleton, Roslyn Belkin, and Erin Nyborg discuss this topic intently in their works.
and Robert Moore, they marry the heroines. Alternatively, when the men are unsuccessful at reforming themselves, like St. John Rivers and Paul Emanuel, they disappear from the narratives. Hence, *community* does not counter men, but counters patriarchy and that is why, regardless of the double-marriage in *Shirley*'s denouement, I argue that the novel retains its feminist status.

In addition to Bronte’s own life, the notion that a woman’s *home* and *self* needs a *community* and that a *community* may consist of men or women is made comprehensible, once again, by the selkie’s mythical narrative. In her lifetime, a selkie passes through three stages: the capture, her wifehood, and the return. The final phase (the selkie’s return to the sea) helps us understand how, without entering a *community*, her journey toward finding her *self* is incomplete. This is because in folklore, selkie tales invariably end with the selkie-bride finding her seal-skin and returning to the sea to join the group of selkies she had been originally separated from. Regardless of her emotional attachment with her family on land, the selkie realizes that it is impossible for her to remain in her human form forever. Consequently, as soon as she finds the hidden seal-skin, she puts it on and returns to the sea. Nancy Cassell Mcentire explains,

> Once a selkie regains her original self, there is no turning back. Even though she has proven herself capable of love, patience and compassion in her human form, she leaves that world behind in one hasty and irrevocable moment of transformation (136-137).

In the *Folklore of Fairytales* (1924), folklorist Macleod Yearsley suggests that a fairy-bride’s return to her original home reflects the matrilocal societies of ancient times. Likewise, according to Carole Silver’s examination of fairy-bride tales, in *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (1999), Silver states that by leaving her husband, the fairy-
bride returned to fairy-folk, usually, a group of women like her. Hence, such return-narratives of selkies (and even other fairy-brides) consistently suggest that for them, home is attached to a community. In the selkie tales collected from Shetland and Faroe islands by folklorist G. F. Black, the selkie sometimes even returns to her selkie-husband if she had been wed before her capture by the human. In such cases, her community that she returns to in the end consists of a man. This kind of variation to the endings of selkie tales emphasize my notion that a community is not specific to one gender.

Like the selkie, the Bronte heroines undergo three stages as well. Typically, Bronte’s narratives begin with scenes that show her readers a glimpse of the heroine’s self. Shortly, the heroine undergoes an entrapment as she encounters her anti-home and becomes forced to live in an anti-self. However, upon active and persistent search for self, the heroine finally finds home.

Interestingly, while a Bronte heroine always finds a home at the end of her narrative, that home always comes with a community. For instance, when Jane Eyre settles at Ferndean (her home), her happiness, as told by Jane herself, has two reasons. First, her life with Rochester, and second, her proximity to her cousins, Mary and Diana Rivers. Unable to separate her happiness in finding both kinds of relationships to cherish, Jane gives her readers the following information, notably, in a single breath,

My Edward and I, then, are happy: and the more so, because those we most love are happy likewise. Diana and Mary Rivers are both married: alternately, once every year, they come to see us, and we go to see them (JE 477).

Furthermore, equally unseparated from her happiness of living with Edward is her relief in not marrying St. John Rivers, her cousin who would have only provided an anti-community to
her. Likewise, Lucy too speaks of happiness with regards to a *community* at the concluding passages of *Villette*. She says, “M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox? Listen. I commenced my school…” (543). In Paul Emanuel’s absence, Lucy opens a girl’s school and surrounds herself with young, intellectual women. Similarly, at the close of *Shirley*, when Robert Moore proposes to Caroline, she agrees and immediately inquires if Shirley and Mrs. Pryor would be near her once they are married. Hence, just like Jane and Lucy, Caroline and Shirley find their happiness not in isolation, neither in a company of a single person, but in a *community*.

Critics have speculated the nature and role of female societies in *Shirley* for decades, often emphasizing on the abiding bond shared by the titular character, Shirley Keeldar, and the central character, Caroline Helstone. At other times, critics have focused on Bronte’s depiction of old maids of England.

Critical commentary on *Shirley* in the late 1970s and early 1980s accuse Bronte for failing to conclude her novel with the same feminist impulse that she uses to build her central figures with. Moglen presents one of the first full-fledged criticism of *Shirley* based on its depiction of women’s relationship with their surroundings. Observing the diverse ways Bronte explores the relationship between women and her society, that is, “women and the poor… women and unemployed laborers … women and children” (158), Moglen concludes that Bronte places her women in various contexts to display the various forms of female oppression in nineteenth-century English society. However, Moglen discloses Bronte’s inability to trace the

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Jane writes, “As to St. John Rivers, he left England: he went to India. He entered on the path he had marked for himself; he pursues it still…St. John is unmarried: he never will marry now. Himself has hitherto sufficed to the toil, and the toil draws near its close: his glorious sun hastens to its setting. The last letter I received from him drew from my eyes human tears, and yet filled my heart with divine joy: he anticipated his sure reward, his incorruptible crown” (477).
radical changes occurring in women’s favor at her time claiming that her own insecurities and failure to embrace feminism led her to depict only female powerlessness. Hence, she admits that while the female friendships featured in the novel is a unique attempt on Bronte’s part, it was also “deeply flawed” as a result of her “personal ambivalence” (Moglen 180). She explains, “The girls’ thoughts are not wholly presented. The process of their relationship is fragmented” (181). Hence, studying how women in Shirley interact in various social and political groups, as well as with each other, Moglen claims that Bronte falls short in accuracy. On the other hand, Gilbert and Gubar state that writing Shirley, Bronte seeks to depict “the pain of female confinement” (373) and “the tribulation … the dependent status of women” (380). Through female friendships, argue Gilbert and Gubar, Bronte only showcases that despite carrying great promise as individuals to subvert social norms, when together, the women in the novel ultimately submit to the expectations society has on their gender. For instance, commenting on Caroline and Shirley’s friendship, the writers state that Shirley enters the novel as Caroline’s double. “What Shirley does is what Caroline would like to do” (Gilbert and Gubar 382), they write. However, eventually, instead of bringing Caroline out of her imprisonment and the state of “complete immobility” (Gilbert and Gubar 380), Shirley too gets trapped in the social prison of marriage and gender roles. They write,

Shirley does not provide the release she first seems to promise Caroline. Instead, she herself becomes emmeshed in a social role that causes her to duplicate Caroline’s immobility … Furthermore, Shirley begins to resemble Caroline in the course of the novel until she finally succumbs to Caroline’s fate. And for all her assertiveness, she is shown to be as confined by her gender, as excluded from male society, as her friend (383).
Similarly, on Mrs. Pryor’s relationship with Caroline, Gilbert and Gubar argue that she too manages to confine Caroline as Caroline ultimately confines Shirley. They write, “Mrs. Pryor … assure[s] her that neither the married state nor a job as governess would offer relief from tedium and loneliness” (388). Therefore, like Moglen, Gilbert and Gubar admit that although well-intentioned, Bronte’s attempt to subvert social norms fail in Shirley because, according to them, 

She [Bronte] began Shirley with the intention of subverting not only the sexual images of literature but the courtship roles and myths from which they derive. But she could find no models for this kind of fiction (395).

In similar vein, Taylor writes in the same year, “While in small ways Shirley breaks social and sexual taboos, in crucial matters she bows to them completely” (89), agreeing with Gilbert and Gubar. Although these writers understand that Shirley is Bronte’s critique of her contemporary patriarchal society, they lament Bronte’s decision to end her novel with an account of how her heroines ultimately demonstrate that the everywoman is unable to change public perception and norms regardless of her individual promise.

In 1981, Roslyn Belkin studies female relationship in Shirley with a special emphasis on Bronte’s depiction of old maids. She observes, “[t]he trials of the mill owners were far outweighed by the wretchedness of the workers in the area” and claims that if there was any group that shared the same measure of wretchedness with the workers, it was the old maids. She writes, “in Shirley, she [Bronte] draws parallels between the misery of the workers and the suffering of unmarried, older women in Briarfield society” (51) claiming that Bronte provides a very accurate portrayal of the misuse of power performed by wealthy mill owners not only on their workers but equally on elderly spinsters. Although Belkin applauds Bronte’s attempt to
demonstrate that “a rebellion on the part of the single women” grants at least “few victories” (63) as Shirley features two such instances: first, characters like Shirley, Caroline, Miss Ainley, Miss Mann, and Hortense Moore come together to provide financial support to the unprivileged in the novel at one point and second, the narrator states that Rose Yorke, being the revolutionary as she is, disobeys her mother’s wish for her to be an old maid and travels to the Southern Hemisphere, Belkin mourns that such instances in novels written by female authors did little to change the real-life scenario for old maids in England. Unlike Moglen and Gilbert and Gubar, Belkin doesn’t criticize Bronte for submitting to reality in her depiction of women’s friendship in the novel. Rather, she accuses Bronte’s “Men of England” (who her narrator speaks to by urging to look after the poor girls) for their failure to do so. However, in Woman and the Demon (1982), Nina Auerbach shares Moglen and Gilbert and Gubar’s stance. Auerbach criticizes Bronte’s inability to write more strongly on old maid’s status in Victorian society as she does in her letters. “Limiting her hero worship to private letters, Charlotte Bronte need not insert the obligatory snicker of derision or sigh of pathos that undermine the old maid’s stature even in her own novels” (112), she writes. In Eros and Psyche (1984), on the other hand, Karen Chase reiterates Gilbert and Gubar’s observation that Shirley explores female power only to have it painfully restricted in the end. Chase writes,

[i]nstead of beginning with a premise of female weakness, it [Shirley] begins with a premise of strength … But the novel introduces this ideal of self-sufficiency [female strength] only to measure its limits (80).

In Perception and Expression in the Novels of Charlotte Bronte (1988), Judith Williams studies Bronte’s decision to write Shirley in third-person and claims that doing so, Bronte
becomes able to have her readers experience the society of Briarfield (the Yorkshire town where *Shirley* is set) from a social rather than a personal point of view.

From the 1990s, critics focus more on narratology of *Shirley* to investigate how narrative techniques and strategies enable Bronte to depict the various gender relations and power struggles in the novel. In 1990, Suzanne Keen introduces ‘narrative annex’ as a concept to talk about how Bronte explores her female characters’ potential to challenge the limitations of gender expectations set by society. According to Keen, ‘narrative annex’ denotes a space (that Anna Lepin calls “divergent settings”) where authors take their characters to test their abilities and limitations in relation to novelistic forms. Keen states that the scene in chapter twenty-one where Shirley and Caroline witness Robert Moore confront the mob in front of his mill carries a narrative annex, i.e, the space over the hedge where the two heroines stand. In that annex, the women experience a reversal of their roles as the leader and the follower. Before entering the annex, Shirley is the leader, but inside it, it is Caroline who wants to lead them to Robert’s rescue. In that scene and in that annex, Keen argues that the women strengthen their bond with each other. In her words, the women “merge synecdochally into one female penetrating force” (114). Hence, in Keen’s reading of *Shirley*, Bronte demonstrates her authorial intention to test her characters roles in relation to the gender expectations surrounding them and in such instances, her women come closer.

In her 1995 essay, Gisela Argyle presents another narratological study that speculates Bronte’s depiction of the “division and conflict between members of the human family in terms of gender …” (742) in *Shirley*. Focusing on the nature of Bronte’s third-person narrator (who Judith Williams calls “disembodied” (78) and Argyle says is therefore, also, “mystifying” (742)), Argyle notes that the narrator presents the story in three different narrative modes: comedy of
manners, historical romance, and psychological romance. Argyle observes that in the first mode (comedic), the narrator is detached from the characters. In the second mode (historical), the narrator is observing and reflective, and in the third mode (psychological), the narrator seems “intimately engaged, to the point of identification with three of the female protagonists” (745). Hence, for Argyle, when it comes to discussing female society, she studies how the third-person narrator becomes an empathetic friend to the female characters in the novel as opposed to any other groups depicted in the narrative, naturally displaying Bronte’s bias toward the female friendship depicted in the novel. Additionally, Argyle also notes how the narrator distinguishes between its subjects in the novel in terms of their gender; while describing the men, the narrator is detached, but when describing the women, the narrator is engaged. In 1997, Nancy Quick Langer discusses how the female friendship in Shirley depicted primarily by the friendship of Caroline and Shirley “capsi[zes] ‘the patriarchal bull’” (276) in the narrative. That is, Langer argues that Shirley’s entrance in the narrative dismantles Robert’s position in it. She writes, “Shirley appropriate[s] and transform[s] Robert’s role as patriarchal center of the narrative” (282). Subsequently Langer argues that Bronte uses the Caroline-Shirley relationship to “challeng[e] traditional narrative constructions of the Victorian heroine by offering potential access to a female imaginary through the discourse of women” (283). She argues that together, Shirley and Caroline create a “subversive space within the text” (276) to critique Victorian conventions. However, like Moglen, Gilbert and Gubar, Langer too reiterates the collective critical disappointment following Bronte’s decision to conclude Shirley by silencing the female voice and breaking the female central position that Bronte so masterfully builds in two-thirds of the novel.
While critics in the 1990s discuss the woman question in terms of narration, in 2003, Sibylle Drack offers a Speech Perception of *Shirley* arguing that it is through “intimate conversations [and] a cooperative speech behavior” (90) that the female friendships in the novel find their chance to develop. Drack identifies the power of discourse in bringing not only Caroline and Shirley, but Caroline and Mrs. Pryor closer in the novel, identifying ‘speech’ as the primary factor binding these characters. Similarly, in a study of myth narratives used in *Shirley* to subvert patriarchal traditions and expectations, in 2004, Tara Moore argues that as the two central female characters of the novel converse about myths like that of the mermaid or Eve, their discourse helps build the way for the characters to identify and reject gendered stereotypes. While Moore bases her argument on the heroines’ discourses on myth and mythical narratives in the novel, Elizabeth Gargano claims that it is “against a background of educational discourse” (780) that the heroines struggle to define themselves. According to Gargano, Bronte stages the events of *Shirley* against the backdrop of educational discourse.

In 2006, Anne Longmuir introduces a new reading of Shirley and Caroline’s friendship, claiming that their relationship could suggest a homosexual bond due to the similarities Longmuir discovers between the fictional Shirley Keeldar and the real-life Anne Lister (1791-1840). Anne Lister was a lesbian Yorkshire landowner who dressed in masculine attire. Historians speak of the high possibility that Emily Bronte and Anne Lister knew each other in 1838 having lived close by. Hence, Longmuir wonders if Bronte heard of Lister through Emily and found inspiration to create Shirley’s traits from her. In her reading, Longmuir claims that like Lister, Shirley “woo[s] a female companion” (148) who is “a weaker, more feminine woman” (145). Observing the similarities between Lister and Shirley and how both women find comfort in befriending other female companion, Longmuir argues, “Bronte suggests for much of
Shirley that male-female relationships are unsuccessful and doomed to failure” (149). As Bronte demonstrates that Caroline is happier and at peace with Shirley than with Robert, Longmuir claims, “[Bronte] repeatedly depict[s] female relations as the most natural” (149). While Longmuir’s study positions Bronte as an advocate of female friendships, Anna Lepine’s 2007 study claims that Bronte, in addition to endorsing successful female companionship, is also biased toward a “virgin solitude” that one of her minor characters, Rose Yorke, seems to be living in at the novel’s present. A study of Rose Yorke, Lepine’s work discusses the plight of old maids as depicted in Shirley and argues that the novel is also demonstrative of “how women writers may subvert narrative form by writing outside the lines of the Victorian marriage plot” (121). According to Lepine, Rose’s “virgin solitude” is Bronte’s way of providing an alternate and more feminist ending for her female characters.

In recent criticism of Shirley, scholars like Michael Lewis, Peter Capuano, and Erin Nyborg have primarily focused on Bronte’s narrative with regards to its commentaries on the industrial politics of Victorian England. In other words, while critics in the 2000s majorly see Shirley as a novel about the ‘woman question,’ and thus, have largely focused on depictions of female friendships in in, critics in the 2010s see Shirley more as an industrial novel, and thus, choose to pair the plight of women with that of the workers of industrial England. Hence, instead of seeing groups of people as a society or a community, Lewis, for instance, calls such groups, “local and social networks” (245). Of female friendships and relationships, Capuano draws connections between “redundancy of human hands caused by mechanization in the mill [and] the surplus of female handiwork in the novel’s middle-class homes” (232). Hence, speaking of female relationships in the novel, Capuano claims that the women in the novel share a connection with the working men. He further states, “Bronte solidifies [the] connection between
Luddite men and middle-class women by tracing the suffering caused by mechanization in the industrial sphere to a particular form of suffering in the domestic sphere” (238).

Due to the bicentennial celebrations of Bronte’s birth in 1816, from 2015 onward, there has been a significant growth of attention toward Bronte’s life and biographical criticism. In that regard, Lutz observes how Shirley is diffused with women’s connection with each other. She writes,

Charlotte’s novel Shirley is more about women smitten with each other than anything else, even though her two heroines ultimately marry men. Charlotte manages to fit two highly charged same-sex connections into the novel. The tender adoration Shirley’s governess, Mrs. Pryor, showers on Caroline, Shirley’s best friend, bears the guise of an obsessive infatuation since neither the characters nor the reader are informed until the last quarter of the book that the older woman is actually Caroline’s long-absent mother (151).

According to Lutz, the relationship between Mrs. Pryor and Caroline and the former’s intention to live with the latter, before it is revealed that they are related, suggests “heterosexual marriage proposal” (151). On the other hand, it is Shirley and Caroline’s friendship that “fuels the plot” (151), writes Lutz. In Charlotte Bronte: A Fiery Heart (2016), Claire Harman performs a biographical study on Bronte and notes that the female friendship in Shirley is a consolidation of Bronte’s friendship with Emily and Anne Bronte, as well as her school friends, Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor.

Significantly, a recent study by Emily Midorikawa and Emma Claire Sweeney titled, A Secret Sisterhood: The Literary Friendships of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Elio, and Virginia Woolf (2017) offers accounts of forgotten female literary friendships
lamenting, “the world’s most celebrated female authors are mythologized as solitary eccentrics or isolated geniuses” (xiii). Speaking of Bronte’s deep, but under-explored friendship with Mary Taylor, Midorikawa and Sweeney write, “[t]heir relationship paints a picture of two courageous individuals, groping to find a space for themselves in the rapidly changing Victorian world” (xvi-xvii). The critics emphasize on the importance of learning about female author’s literary friendships claiming that such insights to their private lives provide invaluable ways of interpreting their fictional works.

While critics, for decades, have explored the nature and role of social groups in Shirley, their subjects have been limited to a study of political groups or a study of spinsters of Victorian England; other groups and their impact on female nature and growth have therefore been under-explored. Additionally, critical works that recognize how friendship and companionship serve Caroline in the novel rely solely on either the Caroline-Shirley relationship or the Caroline-Mrs. Pryor bond, once again, failing to provide a bird’s-eye survey on the various relationships depicted in the novel. Those who do cast a wide-ranging look, however, complain of Bronte’s inability to connect the numerous characters and events in the narrative. While this chapter eagerly conversates with such critics and their claims, it simultaneously provides an original reading of Shirley, keeping on with critics like Harman, Midorikawa, and Sweeney who believe in casting a deeper glance into Bronte’s own life to better understand her fiction.

As illustrated in the introductory passages of this chapter, a comprehensive understanding of a Bronte heroine’s community entails an understanding of her self and home. Because the narrator of Shirley plays a significant role in conveying Caroline’s self to her readers, it is necessary to first discuss her relationship with the novel’s narrator. The narrator in Shirley is a third-person subjective persona that frequently uses free-indirect discourse to convey the events
occurring around Caroline’s life. In addition, the narrator also practices, what Gerrard Genette would say, internal focalization. It is evident that the narrator of *Shirley* focuses mostly on the consciousness of Caroline. Doing so, the narrator gives readers an access to Caroline’s innermost thoughts, often merging the two (narrator’s and Caroline’s) thought processes and presenting them as though they have a singular, unified source. Drack argues, “the narrator adopts Caroline’s perspective and even enters her mental and emotional world” (91). Consequently, the narrator rarely protects Caroline’s privacy from the readers, which, in turn, helps readers listen to and examine Caroline’s private thoughts. For instance, in chapter thirteen, Caroline pines for Robert’s companionship and expresses disappointment after sensing his budding romance with Shirley. Therefore, when the chapter ends with Caroline in her bedroom, ready to sleep, the narrator tells us her final thoughts: “I am not cherishing love dreams; I am only thinking because I cannot sleep. Of course, I know he will marry Shirley” (194). Instead of retiring from the scene, the narrator waits until Caroline wakes up and as she does, starts chapter fourteen with the first thought that crosses her head: “Of course, I know he will marry Shirley” (194). In this manner, the narrator combines its consciousness with Caroline’s to a degree that for the reader, sometimes, it becomes impossible to separate them. In Argyle’s words, the narrator, thus, “intimately engage[s]” (745) with the subject. Therefore, an attempt to construe Caroline’s feelings entails the knowledge that her thoughts are often intermingled with the narrator’s ruminations.

Externally, Caroline seems to embody the notion of Victorian womanhood to the core. According to Langer, Caroline is “the quintessential Victorian heroine” (277). Truly so, she

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79 In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), Genette coins the term, ‘focalization’ which alludes to a narrator’s ability to provide ‘perspective’ to their narration. Genette explains that a narrator performs internal focalization when “the narrative is focused through the consciousness of a character” (29).
is pretty, amiable, generous, compliant, and intelligent. Speaking of Caroline’s appearance and mannerisms, the narrator states,

To [Caroline] had not been denied the gift of beauty. It was not absolutely necessary to know her in order to like her; she was fair enough to please, even at the first view. Her shape suited her age: it was girlish, light, and pliant; every curve was neat, every limb proportionate; her face was expressive and gentle; her eyes were handsome, and gifted at times with a winning beam that stole into the heart, with a language that spoke softly to the affections (56).

Significantly, to this description, the narrator adds, “[a]s to her character or intellect, if she had any, they must speak for themselves in due time” (56). This very character and intellect that the narrator purposefully refrains from describing is Caroline’s *self*.

In previous chapters, I have established that Jane Eyre’s *self* is her animality and Lucy Snowe’s is her anonymity. In other words, when free to assume her own identify and detach herself from any social role, Jane identifies herself as a non-human (sometimes, an animal, and sometimes, a fantastic being like a fairy or an elf) and Lucy feels that her strength lies in her ability to remain unidentifiable. It is evident from *Shirley*’s narrative that essentially, in her *self*, Caroline is a conversationalist. Otherwise timid and reserved, Caroline is vivacious and content when expressing herself in intellectual conversations. As Gilbert and Gubar fittingly observe, “[a]lthough she seems exceptionally docile, Caroline does know her own mind” (377). Subsequently, the space that enables Caroline to hold discourses and participate in conversations is her *home*; the people who understand and encourage this nature is, likewise, her *community*.

Very early in the novel, the narrator enables the readers to easily distinguish Caroline’s *home* from her *anti-home*. That is, in chapter five when Caroline is first introduced, the narrator
makes it evident that while at Hollow’s Cottage with Robert Moore, Caroline is at home, and when she is at the rectory with her uncle, she finds an anti-home. Notably, the chapter that introduces Caroline’s self is named after her home in the novel: “Hollow’s Cottage.” Caroline rejoices in the conversations she holds during her daily visits to the cottage, which belongs to Robert, the millowner of Briarfield who is also Caroline’s cousin and her love interest. He lives with his unmarried elder sister, Hortense. When Caroline is in the cottage, she surrounds herself with topics of the day. She holds discourses on literature, religion, politics, as well as women’s issues. More so, the very reason Caroline visits the cottage regularly is because she is Hortense’s pupil. She learns French from Hortense and practices reciting French poetry with Robert.⁸⁰

Significantly, the very first conversation she has with Robert in the novel touches the issue of women empowerment. That is, when Robert asks if she is happy living with her uncle, Mr. Helstone, Caroline says,

There are moments now when I am not quite satisfied […] I am making no money – earning nothing […] I should like an occupation; and if I were a boy, it would not be so difficult to find one (53).

Stating so, Caroline begins a conversation with Robert regarding women’s ability to find employment. Soon after, Caroline confidently tells Robert that if employed, she can be of help to him:

I could be apprenticed to your trade – the cloth trade. I could learn it of you, as we are distant relations. I would do the counting-house work, keep the books, and write the

⁸⁰ Explaining his and Hortense’s origin and the reason why they speak French, Robert says to his mill worker one day, “I’m an Anversois. My mother was an Anversoise, though she came of French lineage, which is the reason I speak French” (44).
letters, while you went to market. I know you greatly desire to be rich, in order to pay your father's debts; perhaps I could help you to get rich (54).

After speaking freely what she feels about women’s right to seek occupation, Caroline talks about Robert’s position as a mill owner and how it affects his business and relationship with the factory workers. That is, she moves their conversation from social issues to political matters. She points out to Robert his role in instigating revolutionary sentiments in his workers. Additionally, she urges him to revise his manner as a millowner toward the workpeople (54). In conclusion, chapter four makes it evident that Robert provides Caroline the opportunity as well as the atmosphere to engage herself in intellectual conversations.

While Caroline finds home around Robert, she experiences a minor degree of an anti-home when he leaves for work and Hortense engages Caroline in domestic work. Tired, Caroline admits to Hortense that she prefers reading rather than sewing. Intending to stop her needlework, she expresses, “I am tired. May I leave my work now, cousin?” (62). As soon as Robert arrives home from the mill, Caroline suggests that they read Shakespeare instead of playing chess. “We both hate silent games that only keep one’s hands employed, don’t we?” (67), she insists, drawing William Shakespeare’s Coriolanus from the bookshelf. Caroline follows the reading of Shakespeare with Andre Chenier’s “La Jeune Captive” (trans. “The Young Captive”). Hence, at the cottage, while in Robert’s presence, Caroline immerses herself in conversations and educational discourses. Argyle notes, “discourse [is] a theme in Shirley” (95). Truly so, in the first third of Shirley’s narrative, it is Caroline who makes it so.

While Caroline’s home is clearly a space of expressions and conversations, her anti-home, the rectory, is a space of silence and of only one-sided conversations that Caroline begins, but her uncle fails to give life to. Walking to the rectory with Robert after an evening at the
cottage, Caroline shares, “I rarely talk to my uncle. He thinks everything but sewing and cooking
above women’s comprehension, and out of their line” (70). As means of a contrast to Caroline’s
lively night at Hollow’s Cottage, the narrator illustrates how the rectory is a space lacking, not of
spoken words, but of dialogues:

Caroline, having been conveyed home by Robert, had no wish to pass what
remainder of the evening with her uncle. The room in which he sat was very sacred
ground to her; she seldom intruded on it (74).

Bidding her uncle only a good night, Caroline enters her bedroom. Describing how she
retires, the narrator states, “presently the niece was enclosed in her small bedroom” (emphasis
added 74). Arguably, although the narrator doesn’t directly specify, the Chenier poem Caroline
reads aloud to Robert in chapter four reflects her captivity in the rectory that the narrator shows
in chapter five. Instances when Caroline attempts to overcome her anti-home, her uncle chooses
not to entertain her. For instance, in chapter six, Caroline attempts to discuss the rewards and
shortcomings of marriage. Initially, Mr. Helstone, in response, provides short answers. However,
the conversation tires the rector very soon and he dismisses Caroline’s queries exclaiming, “your
questions are stupid and babyish” (77), putting end to the conversation altogether. Naturally, at
the rectory, Caroline remains mostly silent. The narrator states that Mr. Helstone takes “little
trouble about [Caroline’s] education” (57) and around her uncle, the niece is generally “quiet and
timid … very docile, but not communicative” (75). In words of Gilbert and Gubar, Caroline
“lives invisibly” with a person who mostly “ignores her” (377). Gilbert and Gubar further
observe that Mr. Helstone offers his niece only a physical presence (377). Hence, for someone
like Caroline whose self depends on communications, conversations, expressions, and
discourses, when she is forced remain unexpressive, she is in her anti-self.
Living in her *anti-self* for an extended period weakens a Bronte heroine emotionally and physically.\(^8\) We know that Caroline’s *self* is in holding conversations because when she is deprived of it, she becomes ill. While Caroline is “animated, interested, and touched” (S. 73) at Hollow’s Cottage, while at the rectory, in Belkin’s words, “she suffers stoically and in secret” (57). However, when Robert distances himself from Caroline showing indifference as well as disinterest in what she has to say (which we later find out is due to his inability to consolidate his love and business needs), Caroline begins to display signs of emotional weakness. Following a few months of continued disregard shown by Robert toward Caroline, the narrator states that Caroline declines physically,

Caroline looked at the little mirror before her … She could see that she was altered within the last month; that the hues of her complexion were paler, her eyes changed—a wan shade seemed to circle them; her countenance was dejected—she was not, in short, so pretty or so fresh as she used to be (135).

When Caroline’s health wavers due to her entrapment in her *anti-self*, she becomes akin to the selkie who, in fear of extreme physical difficulty, attempts to accept rather than reject the *anti-self*. To elaborate, when a selkie sunbathes in the shores of the North Sea, she sheds her seal-skin and assumes a human form. At this point of human-hood, she is in her *anti-self*. However, at this point, she is neither weak nor uncomfortable. This is because the selkie knows of the impermanence of her *anti-self*; she stays in her human form with the knowledge that she is free to return to her *self* (become a seal) upon her will. All she needs to do is wear back her seal-skin. It is when a fisherman steals the seal-skin and captures her that the *anti-self* becomes prominent and troublesome. Even so, in selkie tales, when a fisherman takes a selkie to his house

\(^8\) I demonstrate this in chapter two as I discuss Lucy Snowe’s reactions to her *anti-self* and how the selkie tale corroborates such observations. I discuss this in pages 22 – 26.
making her his bride, folklorists state that during the initial days, the selkie tries to accept her new life by “excelling in the menial domestic tasks” (Silver 91) as a dutiful wife. McEntire explains,

> Once [a selkie’s] skin is ‘taken’ she also is removed from her animal life and must conform to human society. She often longs for the sea, but she resigns herself to her fate and becomes a dutiful wife and mother (127).

Therefore, after losing her *self*, the selkie attempts to embrace her *anti-self*. However, gradually, the inconvenience she experiences at first turns to extreme difficulty and the selkie realizes that a permanent life in her *anti-self* is impossible. At this point, she retaliates inwardly and weakens physically. Similarly, at first, having Hollow’s Cottage to frequently visit, Caroline doesn’t mind assuming her *anti-self* at the rectory knowing that she would have to remain in her *anti-self* only temporarily until her next visit to the Hollow’s Cottage. However, once Robert begins distancing himself and stops welcoming her at the cottage, Caroline’s prospect of escaping to her *home* weakens and subsequently, she feels the clasps of her *anti-self* around her. Her confidence falters and her temperament wanes. To support herself, Caroline embraces her *anti-self*, trying to internalize the social teaching that a woman’s duty should be placed above her desire. At this instance, the narrator ruminates,

> a lover feminine can say nothing; if she did, the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. Nature would brand such demonstration as a rebellion against her instincts, and would vindictively repay it afterwards by the thunderbolt of self-contempt smiting suddenly in secret. Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions, utter no remonstrances (79).

Like the selkie, Caroline resigns to her fate as well:
You expected bread, and you have got a stone: break your teeth on it … do not doubt your mental stomach … the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind; in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob. For the whole remnant of your life, if you survive the test—some, it is said, die under it—you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive (S. 79).

Speaking about this process of consciously conforming to her social role, Drack writes, “Caroline has well internalized the social restrictions imposed on women and reacts exactly according to what her uncle, and society, consider wise: she accepts her fate and keeps quiet” (86). Hence, Caroline attempts to accept her anti-self.

At this instance, readers are only in chapter six of Shirley, that is, only one-fifth into the novel. The thirty-two chapters that follow are about Caroline’s continuation of accepting her anti-self, punctuated by a few relapses and outbreaks. Unsurprisingly, Bronte’s famous description of Shirley in chapter one – “something real, cool, and solid lies before you; something as unromantic as a Monday morning” (3) – looks apt as the narrative continues to trace Caroline’s inaction in various platforms. She thinks of herself as a blend of “poverty and incapacity” (S. 194) and unconfident, remains frustratingly inactive in seeking Robert. “Shirley is about impotence … characters defined by their very inability to initiate action” (375), write Gilbert and Gubar. Although the statement, in my opinion, is untrue for many of Bronte’s characters in the novel, it stands patently true for Caroline.
While many critics like Lewis, Gilbert and Gubar, Langer, and Lepine have claimed that the various incidents and characters in *Shirley* lack cohesion, Andrew and Judith Hook observe that in Shirley, “we are asked to see how the patterns of individual lives are moulded by social attitudes and forces over which they have no control” (1). In a thorough extension of Hooks’ observation, I argue that the events and people Bronte introduces after chapter six in the narrative fall in either of the two categories: Caroline’s community or Caroline’s anti-community. Therefore, when perceived through this lens, *Shirley* displays all three aspects that Lewis famously says the novel lacks – passionate link, artistic fusion, and intergrowth.

Bronte ends chapter six with a conflict – Caroline’s inability to speak freely with Robert. This conflict finds its resolution only in the final chapters of the novel and for this reason, it can be perceived that Caroline’s is the novel’s primary conflict. According to Amanda Anderson’s reading of *Shirley*, to every problem that a writer of a political novel (such as Bronte) exposes, there is “some sort of solution” (341). For Caroline’s problem, Bronte’s turns not to an individual, but to Caroline’s society for solution, suggesting that a woman’s problem is in fact a social problem. Hence, in my opinion, Bronte makes Caroline inactive for a definite reason. By building a conflict around her heroine and then paralyzing her, Bronte urges her readers to reflect on the role people around that heroine can play to rescue her. Therefore, after chapter six, she presents her characters in two forms: (i) being part of a community where they enable Caroline to practice her self and help her find home and (ii) being part of an anti-community where people disable such endeavors, forcing her to indoctrinate social conventions and therefore, to live in her anti-self.
Bronte turns to her novel’s fictional society at a time of her heroine’s personal loss because having lost her own community (Emily and Anne) during Shirley’s composition, it is her society consisting of Williams, Gaskell, Martineau, Nussey, and Taylor that uplifts and restores her. Bronte’s letters indicate that following the death of Emily and Anne, while Williams, Gaskell, Martineau, and Taylor provide her support by continuing to engage Bronte in intellectual conversations of the day, exchanging books as well as thoughts, Nussey provides the emotional support. Of this, Moglen writes,

Her friendship with Mary Taylor had long stimulated her feminist consciousness.

The writings of her two new friends Elizabeth Gaskell and Harriet Martineau, give that consciousness a more objective focus (155).

Hence, a society of educated and empathetic individuals help Bronte recuperate. Without a doubt, Bronte replicates such societies in Shirley by not only presenting characters based on their ability to intellectually and emotionally support Caroline, but also presenting a reversal of such societies (anti-communities) to demonstrate how detrimental unsupportive social behavior can be for a woman.

Shirley’s conflict begins with Caroline losing Robert’s company. It intensifies as Mr. Helstone forbids her to communicate with him altogether. For Caroline, the loss is comparable to a death of a loved one. Deep in sorrow and in mourning, Caroline’s anti-community appears first in form of her conscience. Her conscience that has developed from her indoctrination tells her to suppress her self and embrace her anti-self:

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82 Mr. Helstone forbids his niece from communicating with the Moore siblings due to his new found political differences with them. He tells Caroline, “There must be no letter-scribbling to your cousin Hortense – no intercourse whatever. I do not approve of the principles of the family. They are Jacobinical” (130)
If she is weak, she will … lose his esteem and win his aversion; if she has sense, she will be her own governor, and resolve to subdue and bring under guidance the disturbed realm of her emotions. She will determine to look on life steadily, as it is; to begin to learn its severe truths seriously, and to study its knotty problems closely, conscientiously … It appeared she had a little sense, for she quitted Robert quietly, without complaint or question (81).

As this internalized anti-community fills her mind, the narrative then introduces Caroline’s living anti-community in two groups, first consisting of the curates: Mr. Malone, Mr. Donne, and Mr. Sweeting, and second consisting of the Sykes women: Mrs. Sykes and her daughters, the Misses Sykes.

The curates are Caroline’s anti-community not only because they obstruct her from holding conversations but because they treat women as an inferior sex incapable of carrying intellectual thoughts altogether. They share her uncle’s view on women which the narrator explains,

[Mr. Helstone] made no pretense of comprehending women, or comparing them with men. They were a different, probably a very inferior, order of existence. A wife could not be her husband's companion, much less his confidante, much less his stay (39).

The curates, Caroline’s “undesired guests” (S. 82) share such mentality. Caroline addresses the curates as “that particular trio” (82). Her reduction of three men to a group displays her willingness to see them as one negative force rather than three separate individuals. Despite being educated, for Caroline, the men are a bore, starkly different from Robert. They argue, the narrator says at the beginning of the novel,
not on politics, nor on philosophy, nor on literature … not even on theology practical or doctrinal, but on minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles (6).

Notably, when the curates arrive to the rectory, Caroline reflects on their difference with Robert:

Caroline heard their boyish laughter, and the vacant cackle of their voices … What distinctions people draw! These three were men—young men—educated men, like Moore; yet, for her, how great the difference! Their society was a bore—his a delight (82).

Isolating Mr. Donne, the narrator elaborates on Caroline’s aversion toward people like him. That is, the readers are told, Caroline dislikes Donne “on account of his stultified and immovable self-conceit and his incurable narrowness of mind” (83). Caroline disproves of his “abuse of the people of Briarfield” because “a Yorkshire girl herself, she hated to hear Yorkshire abused by such a pitiful prater” (S. 84). Furthermore, they make her comfortable by perceiving her ability to talk as being impudent.

While the curates challenge Caroline’s intellect by perceiving her participation in their conversations as “audacious and impious” (85), the Sykes women challenge Caroline’s way of life. Like “that particular trio,” the Sykes women are, for Caroline, “a showy trio” (83); such remark hint at the similarities they share with the curates for Caroline, both groups being her anti-communities. Introducing the women, the narrator speaks of their inability to let anyone converse with them. The narrator states,

In English country ladies there is this point to be remarked. … they all (or almost all) have a certain expression stamped on their features, which seems to say, "I know—I
do not boast of it, but I know that I am the standard of what is proper; let every one therefore whom I approach, or who approaches me, keep a sharp lookout, for wherein they differ from me—be the same in dress, manner, opinion, principle, or practice—therein they are wrong. … Mrs. and Misses Sykes, far from being exceptions to this observation, were pointed illustrations of its truth (83).

As a result of such attitude, the collective “I know” disallows Caroline from holding any meaningful conversation with them. Furthermore, the Sykes women rejoice in criticizing Caroline for preferring to read a book over attending the church, directly challenging Caroline’s preference of desire over duty. When the two groups – curates and the Sykes – meet, Caroline is incapable of “keeping up the conversation” due to “the unmeaning hum around her” (S. 84). Exhausted, Caroline “slip[s] quietly out of the apartment [to] seek a moment’s respite in solitude” (86), conveys the narrator. Critics recognize how incompatible the curates and the Sykes women are with Caroline. While Langer calls the group Bronte’s “critique [of] the social system […] constructing around Caroline” (279), Drack recognizes the Sykeses as “women who through their own socialization have internalized social rules” (86). Such verification corroborates the notion that they belong to Caroline’s anti-community.

Bronte presents Caroline’s anti-communities in two forms – one that consciously restricts her self (consisting of the curates and the Sykes women) and the other that unintentionally restrict her self (consisting of some married women and old maids of Briarfield). By presenting anti-community in these forms, Bronte establishes that sometimes, society obstructs a woman’s intellectual and emotional growth inadvertently too. Hortense Moore, Mrs.

83 Helen McEwan, the author of The Brontes in Brussels (2014), notes that Charlotte Bronte came across such societies of women in Brussels who later inspired characters like Mrs. Sykes in Shirley.*
Yorke, Miss Mann, and Miss Ainley form such an anti-community. Although these women love Caroline, each are incapable of realizing Caroline’s self. This is because these women have themselves internalized their anti-selves to a strong degree. As Langer aptly describes, by introducing characters like Hortense, “Bronte’s text critiques the female subject’s complicity in a system that both marginalizes and contains her” (278). Introducing Luce Irigaray in this context, Langer writes,

“As Irigaray notes, patriarchal society operates in the name of the father and organizes all social property so that it benefits (male) head of the family; a mother, ‘marked with the name of the father’ both reinforces and perpetuates the patriarchal order (278).

Langer, thus, identifies Hortense as the mother who “naturalizes” (279) the patriarchal order. In my opinion, women like Mrs. Yorke, Miss Mann and Miss Ainley do the same. The narrator describes Mrs. Yorke’s view of ideal womanhood thus,

Mrs. Yorke had that notion, and grave as Saturn she was, morning, noon, and, night; and hard things she thought if any unhappy wight—especially of the female sex—who dared in her presence to show the light of a gay heart on a sunny countenance. In her estimation, to be mirthful was to be profane, to be cheerful was to be frivolous.130 She drew no distinctions. Yet she was a very good wife, a very careful mother, looked after her children unceasingly, was sincerely attached to her husband (112).

While Mrs. Yorke believes that the female sex should suppress desire, Miss Mann believes that they should suppress desire through self-sacrifice. Describing Miss Mann, the narrator states,
She was a perfectly honest, conscientious woman, who had performed duties in her day from whose severe anguish many a human Peri, gazelle-eyed, silken-tressed, and silver-tongued, would have shrunk appalled. She had passed alone through protracted scenes of suffering, exercised rigid self-denial, made large sacrifices of time, money, health for those who had repaid her only by ingratitude, and now her main—almost her sole—fault was that she was censorious (137).

Similarly, speaking of Miss Ainley, the narrator states,

The old maid was too poor to give much, though she straitened herself to privation that she might contribute her mite when needful. They were the works of a Sister of Charity—far more difficult to perform than those of a Lady Bountiful. She would watch by any sick-bed; she seemed to fear no disease. She would nurse the poorest whom none else would nurse. She was serene, humble, kind, and equable through everything (139).

While all four women— at different points in the narrative—display their fondness toward Caroline, their persistence in living a life of anti-self proves detrimental to her. Langer observes that at one instance, Caroline sees Mrs. Sykes, Miss Mann, and Miss Ainley “as her potential role models” (279). When with them, Caroline aspires “[to] become superior to her present self” (S. 83) by replicating them. Hence, as Drack aptly identifies, their societies are to Caroline “rather harmful than helpful” (86) because they collectively “forc[e] her to return to her present lonely condition” (Gilbert and Gubar 379). As a result, despite being a heterogenous mix of married as well as unmarried women who seem disconnected with each other on the surface, Mrs. Sykes, Misses Sykes, Mrs. Yorke, Miss Moore, Miss Mann, and Miss Ainley can be placed together in one unified platform of the novel— as Caroline’s anti-community.
Shirley Keeldar’s fairly late entrance into a narrative that she lends her name to is, in my opinion, skillfully planned by Bronte. That is, Bronte brings Shirley and Mrs. Pryor almost as a solution to the problem of *anti-communities* in the narrative. Gilbert and Gubar write, “Shirley emerges only when Caroline has been completely immobilized through her own self-restraint and submission” (382). Truly so, before chapter ten, on losing her original *community* (Robert), Caroline falls deep into her *anti-self*. “Men and women never struggle so hard as when they struggle alone, without witness, counsellor, or confidant, unencouraged, unadvised, and unpitied” (141), states the narrator describing Caroline’s loneliness due to her inability to express and conversate like she used to. Around her *anti-communities*, Caroline is reduced to a listener. As Lepine observes, Miss Mann and Miss Ainley are themselves “trapped in the role their society has created for them” (126) in which they seek to trap Caroline as well. Hence, while the old maids at Briarfield miscalculate Caroline’s desire to speak, the rest suppress it. As a result, Caroline weakens. The narrator expresses the ambiguous nature of Caroline’s emotional and physical weakness:

She took walks in all weathers, long walks in solitary directions … yet seemingly not fatigued … Sometimes she would not sit down till she was literally faint … at night, when others slumbered, she was tossing on her pillow … Often, unhappy girl! she was crying—crying in a sort of intolerable despair, which, when it rushed over her, smote down her strength, and reduced her to childlike helplessness (141).

Notably, when alone, Caroline desires things that signify her want of a *community*. First, she thinks about Robert – “she feared [Robert] would withdraw his friendship (not love) from her” (S. 142). The ‘not love’ in parenthesis explains the nature of Caroline’s sorrow and as a result, supports my assessment that Caroline’s primary reason of grief is her inability to retain a
community rather than her inability to have Robert reciprocate her love. The passages that follow strengthen this view. The narrator describes how, in such moment of solitude and sorrow, Caroline thinks of her estranged mother. “She longed for something else” the narrator explains, “the deep, secret, anxious yearning to discover and know her mother strengthened daily” (142). Caroline’s desire to reunite with her mother coincides with her desire to leave Briarfield to serve as a governess. Hence, Caroline’s yearnings (for Robert’s friendship, her mother’s company, for having young minds to govern) convey that she wishes for a society that will uplift her emotionally as well as intellectually.

Shirley arrives in Caroline’s life by bringing a community that fulfills her desires to gain a companion for intellectual exchanges as well as to gain a companion for emotional bonding. While Shirley fulfills her former wish, Mrs. Pryor fulfills the latter. Because Bronte presents Shirley as the provider of conversations and discourses (an aspect of Robert’s company that she misses), the first thing that Caroline likes about Shirley is her voice and Shirley’s ability to communicate. Speaking once again on Caroline’s behalf, the narrator states about Shirley,

She and this lady would, if alone, have at once got on extremely well together. The lady had the clearest voice imaginable … This voice Caroline liked; it atoned for the formal, if correct, accent and language. The lady would soon have discovered she liked it and her, and in ten minutes they would have been friends. But Mr. Helstone stood on the rug looking at them both, looking especially at the strange lady with his174 sarcastic, keen eye (149).

Furthermore, the first things the narrator describes about Shirley are her intelligence and ability to communicate effectively as well – “[her face] was pale naturally, but intelligence, and of varied expression” (S. 150). Keen observes the scene where Caroline and Shirley meet and states
how the latter carries an aura of independence and energy that makes her attractive to the visitor (111). Similarly, Mrs. Pryor is introduced based on her communication skills and intellect as well. Summarizing her introduction to Mr. Helstone, the narrator writes,

The ex-governess disclaimed skill either in political or religious controversy, explained that she thought such matters little adapted for female minds, but avowed herself in general terms the advocate of order and loyalty, and, of course, truly attached to the Establishment (150).

Hence, as Caroline walks into Fieldhead with her anti-community, despite Mr. Helstone’s presence, her new community stands out to her.

Shirley fulfills Caroline’s need for intellectual conversations effectually and completely. “Shirley showed she had been sincere in saying she should be glad of Caroline’s society, by frequently seeking it” (155), the narrator states. Praising her conversational skills, the narrator further gives an account of her successful communications with other families of Briarfield. On the very first hike that the two women take by themselves, Shirley speaks of the presence of men in women’s lives and states how it can be of two types – the wrong sort and the right sort (159). Reflecting on her ability to distinguish societies on the basis of right and wrong, Shirley says, “I can hardly tell … one easy to feel [the ability], difficult to describe” (159). In my opinion, this is where Bronte implants her view of society unto Shirley’s mind – that a society can be of the right sort or the wrong, reflecting the theory of community and anti-community.

Like Caroline’s community, Shirley displays an ability to challenge and confront her anti-community. Despite finding Misses Sykes and other members of Caroline’s anti-community “[not] very genial” Shirley manages to be “quite free and [on] easy terms” (S. 155) with them,
thus, displaying the capacity to override them – a capacity Caroline lacks as demonstrated by the
previous chapters in the novel. Additionally, Shirley inquires if Mr. Helstone has been affable to
Caroline – “Are you fond of him? Is he kind to you? Now, speak the truth … Is he tyrannical?”
(160), she urges. Reminding one of Caroline’s conversations with Robert about literature,
Shirley invites her to participate in literary discourses as well. The two women discuss poetry,
particularly of William Cowper.84 Notably, the discussion encourages Caroline to not only
express herself, but also defend the act of expression. Caroline tells Shirley,

He was nearly broken-hearted when he wrote that poem … But he found relief in writing
it—I know he did; and that gift of poetry … was, I believe, granted to allay emotions
when their strength threatens harm. It seems to me, Shirley, that nobody should write
poetry to exhibit intellect or attainment. Who cares for that sort of poetry? And who does
not care for feeling—real feeling—however simply, even rudely expressed? (169).

With such articulation, Caroline expresses herself freely for the first time after losing Robert’s
companionship.

While Shirley proves that she understands human society in two terms – the wrong sort
and the right sort, that is, in terms of community and anti-community, in the scene where she
reflects on John Milton’s Eve, Shirley also displays an understanding of a woman’s being that
reflects my theory of self and anti-self.85 When Shirley senses the presence of Eve in nature as
the two women talk by the woods, Caroline asks if she means Milton’s Eve. To this, Shirley
ardently replies,

84 William Cowper (1731-1800) was an English poet and a hymnodist who Bronte frequently read, according to her biographers.
85 It can be deduced that the two women discuss John Milton’s Paradise Lost (1667-74) in chapter eighteen.
Milton's Eve! … Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not … It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, as I have seen her, making custards, in the heat of summer … (240).

According to Shirley, therefore, Milton didn’t create Eve’s self, but created her anti-self – a woman with a social role and purpose. Rectifying Milton, Shirley continues to give Eve a self, an identity independent of her social role in the world –

The first woman was heaven-born … I now see—a woman-Titan. Her robe of blue air spreads to the outskirts of the heath, where yonder flock is grazing; a veil white as an avalanche sweeps from her head to her feet, and arabesques of lightning flame on its borders. Under her breast I see her zone, purple like that horizon; through its blush shines the star of evening. Her steady eyes I cannot picture. They are clear, they are deep as lakes, they are lifted and full of worship, they tremble with the softness of love and the lustre of prayer … I will stay out here with my mother Eve, in these days called Nature (240-1).

Shirley, thus, in words of Langer, presents “a revision of Eve” (286), which helps Caroline locate “real women outside of patriarchal definitions” (288). That is, Shirley enables Caroline to think of womanhood in terms of a woman’s self and discard venerating the anti-self, like everyone venerates Eve as Adam’s wife, someone who is “vague and visionary” (S. 240). Because Shirley helps Caroline grow intellectually, the two women continue to nourish their friendship from there on. As Moglen observes, “the intelligence and decency of Caroline and Shirley … make their friendship possible” (178).
In addition to fulfilling Caroline’s desire to hold intellectual conversations and discourses, Shirley also promises that the two friends will travel, inadvertently fulfilling Caroline’s desire to leave Briarfield. Notably, when Shirley imagines them travelling, she proposes that they visit the Shetland and Faroe islands – notably, the home of the selkie folklore. Shirley says,

This summer, Caroline, Mrs. Pryor and I go out into the North Atlantic, beyond the Shetland, perhaps to the Faroe Isles. We will see seals in Suderoe, and, doubtless, mermaids in Stromoe (182).  

Shirley also shares a desire to explore Yorkshire further as she plans a trip with Caroline to visit the ruins of Nunnely and a hike in the woods with books and pencils. As Shirley satisfies Caroline’s wishes one after the other, the narrator reflects on how the two women find each other’s company fulfilling and rewarding – “The minds of the two girls being toned in harmony often chimed very sweetly together” (168). Despite Caroline’s reclusive nature, Shirley recognizes her intelligence and aptitude. “[Y]ou are a peculiar personage” she expresses, “Quiet as you look, there is both a force and a depth somewhere within not easily reached or appreciated” (197). However, arriving as Caroline’s community in the narrative, Shirley reaches as well as appreciates what she discovers in Caroline. Drack observes as I do that Shirley’s and Caroline’s friendship grows because of intellectual conversations. She writes, “the development of their friendship is mainly depicted in the reproduction of many intimate and confidential conversations between the two” (90). Since Caroline’s self is in having conversations, Shirley

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86 In the introduction (pages ___), I discuss Bronte’s interest in folklore and the possibility that Bronte knew of the selkie folklore as a result of this conversation of seals and mermaids.
sharing intellectual as well as intimate conversations with Caroline, therefore, helps her strengthen her *self*.

Mrs. Pryor, on the other hand, provides motherly care and nurture to the orphan Caroline. “Nothing could be less demonstrative than the friendship of the elder lady” says the narrator describing Mrs. Pryor’s caring nature; “Caroline ere long took delight in depending on her” (166), we learn. Caroline praises Mrs. Pryor’s ability to handle her role as Shirley’s governess with ease – “she filled with such quiet independency a very dependent post” (S. 166). Just as Shirley recognizes Caroline’s *self* and checks on her *anti-community*, Mrs. Pryor does the same.

The moment she enters the rectory to visit Caroline, the old lady notices its unsuitability. “You must feel lonely here, having no female relative in the house; you must necessarily pass much of your time in solitude” (165), observes Mrs. Pryor. As a solution, she tells Caroline to seek her company; “Should you chance to require help in your studies … you may command me” (165), she offers. In their first walk together, Mrs. Pryor also inquires about Mr. Helstone’s treatment of Caroline like Shirley does in their first meeting. She checks if he is “too harsh with his niece” (280). Furthermore, Mrs. Pryor displays to Caroline that she too can provide Caroline an educative atmosphere. When the two women walk in the woods in chapter twenty one, Mrs. Pryor displays a deep and impressive knowledge of botany. The narrator says,

Mrs. Pryor talked to her companion about the various birds singing in the trees, discriminated their species, and said something about their habits and peculiarities. English natural history seemed familiar to her. All the wild flowers round their path were recognized by her; tiny plants springing near stones and peeping out of chinks in old walls—plants such as Caroline had scarcely noticed before—received a name and an
intimation of their properties. It appeared that she had minutely studied the botany of English fields and woods (179).

Eventually, when Caroline suffers a seemingly fatal illness, Mrs. Pryor nurses her to health. In addition to providing a motherly care, Mrs. Pryor heightens Caroline’s sense of community by revealing that she is, indeed, her mother who had abandoned Caroline as an infant. Significantly, when the old lady tells her daughter of the features she has inherited from herself, Mrs. Pryor proudly says, “Papa, my darling, gave you your blue eyes and soft brown hair … the outside he conferred; but the heart and the brain are mine” (321). By recognizing that Caroline’s mind matches her own despite having different physical features, Mrs. Pryor seals her place as Caroline’s community in the novel.

Just as Caroline perceives her anti-community as “that particular trio” or “the showy trio,” she sees Shirley and Mrs. Pryor’s company to be a pleasant and independent “society” (166) where she feels safe and equal. Describing the two women and how she feels in their company, the narrator states, “there was a sense of equality experienced … never known in that or the ordinary Briarfield and Whinbury gentry” (167). As a result, Caroline experiences “a happy change” (166) in her community. She thinks of Shirley more as a sister than a friend – “Shirley, I never had a sister – you never had a sister; but it flashes me at this moment how sisters feel towards each other – affection twined with their life” (197), Caroline reflects. The narrator later adds, for Caroline, “Miss Keeldar was better in her single self than a host of ordinary friends” (219). Hence, Caroline personalizes her community and finds not only a mother, but also a sister.
In *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontes* (1975), Terry Eagleton observes that Shirley is like Caroline, but only a little more male and a little more superior. He adds, “[Shirley] becomes for Caroline an ideal self-image to be revered” (58). Simplifying Eagleton’s observation, Gilbert and Gubar state, “Shirley is Caroline’s double” (382). The critics also aptly explain *how so*, an explanation Eagleton neglects. However, Gilbert and Gubar’s observation also makes one wonder *why* Bronte invites Shirley as Caroline’s double. An answer to this, I argue that Bronte intends to invite Shirley as Caroline’s savior as well. She does this to show her readers that in addition to encouraging a woman’s *self* like Robert does, a right society can rescue a woman from her *anti-self* as well. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “What Shirley does is what Caroline would like to do” (382). They elaborate,

Caroline’s secret hatred for the curates is gratified when Shirley angrily throws them out of her house after they are attacked by her dog; Caroline needs to move Helstone, and Shirley bends him to her will; Caroline wishes … she could penetrate the business secrets of men, while Shirley reads the newspapers and letters of the civic leaders; Caroline wants to lighten Robert’s financial burden and Shirley secures him a loan; Caroline tries to repress her desire for Robert, while Shirley gains his attention and proposal of marriage (383).

Alternatively, the same actions can be perceived differently to see how Shirley saves Caroline in each of the instances that Gilbert and Gubar mention. First, she saves Caroline from the curates’ attack on Yorkshire. When Mr. Malone dishonors the Yorkshire folk the first time at the rectory, Caroline is only able to timidly disagree and leave their company in annoyance. However, when Mr. Malone repeats his comments in Shirley’s presence at Fieldhead, it is Malone who is made
to leave the women’s company in embarrassment. He is ordered to leave the house by Shirley, thus saving Caroline from the double humiliation caused by Malone. Second, by saving Robert’s business, Shirley saves Caroline. The narrator makes it evident that Caroline internalizes Robert’s troubles frequently and intently. On Caroline’s effort to understand Robert by placing herself in his shoes, the narrator states,

Caroline meditated in her own way on the subject; speculated on his feelings, on his life, on his fears, on his fate; mused over the mystery of ‘business,’ tried to comprehend more about it than had ever been told her—to understand its perplexities, liabilities, duties, exactions; endeavored to realize the state of mind of a ‘man of business,’ to enter into it, feel what he would feel, aspire to what he would aspire. Her earnest wish was to see things as they were, and not to be romantic (131).

Robert’s pain that she tries to feel herself is lifted, thus, when Shirley lends Robert a significant sum to help him override his problems. Third, by getting Robert’s proposal and thus, receiving a chance to reject it and pointing out why he shouldn’t think of marriage as a business venture, Shirley saves Caroline from dying of heartbreak. Additionally, the idea that Shirley is Caroline’s savior is demonstrated by the narrator as well. The primary reason Shirley befriends Caroline is because she thinks Caroline needs help – In Caroline Miss Keeldar had first taken an interest because she was quiet, retiring, looking delicate, and seemed as if she needed someone to take care of her (167). Most importantly, it is Bronte’s decision to name her novel after Shirley that confirms my estimation that Bronte intends to present Shirley as someone more than just her heroine’s double. Although critics like Belkin state that Bronte names her novel ‘Shirley’ because Shirley Keeldar is its central character (59), I feel Bronte’s rationale is different and
more profound. In August of 1849, Bronte writes to Williams, walking him through her thought-process on choosing a title for her recently completed novel (Shirley). She writes,

If I remember rightly my Cornhill critics object to “Hollow’s Mill” nor do I now find it appropriate. It might rather be called “Fieldhead” – though, I think “Shirley” would perhaps be the best title: “Shirley” I fancy has turned out the most prominent and peculiar character in the work (Letters 237).

I believe it is significant piece of information that Bronte’s final choices were ‘Fieldhead’ and ‘Shirley’ because while one of them is Caroline’s home (because Shirley and Mrs. Pryor live in Fieldhead), the other is Caroline’s community – both entities that rescue Caroline from her anti-home, anti-self, and anti-community. Furthermore, Bronte’s choice of ‘Villette’ as the title of her third novel demonstrates how after Jane Eyre, her novels are named after atmospheres that help her heroines subsist and escape a life of tribulations.

While I have established that Bronte intends to present Shirley as Caroline’s savior, I also believe that she does so with a specific goal in mind – Bronte suggests that a woman needs a community for two reasons: first, to exercise her self and second, to rediscover her self once she has been caught in her anti-self. Hence, there are two kinds of communities in Shirley. The first, provided to Caroline by Robert, is a community that helps the heroine discover as well as practice her self. Robert helps her identify herself as someone who is more than just the rector’s niece who should submit to womanly duties like needlework. Conversations with Robert help Caroline discover her inner nature. For instance, it is by speaking with him that she realizes she is a democrat. “You are a little democrat, Caroline. If your uncle knew, what would he say?” (70) Robert once asks her, teasingly. On the other hand, conversations with Shirley and
Mrs. Pryor help Caroline re-discover her *self*. With them, she realizes that living is “a trial no longer” (219).

Bronte presents *communities* in two forms because in her life, she experienced support in two forms as well. From her sisters Emily and Anne, Bronte received what Robert provides Caroline – an atmosphere to assume her *self*. From Nussey, Taylor, Gaskell, Martineau, and Williams, on the other hand, Bronte received what Shirley and Mrs. Pryor provides Caroline – the chance to rediscover her *self* after losing it momentarily. To elaborate, as Gaskell details in *Life*, Bronte develops as an author in the company of her sisters. Describing a typical evening in the Bronte household, Gaskell writes,

The sisters … put away their work at nine o’clock, and beg[un] their study, pacing up and down the sitting room. At this time, they talked over the stories they were engaged upon, and described their plots. Once or twice a week, each read to the others what she had written, and heard what they had to say about it. Charlotte told me, that … the readings were of great and stirring interest to all, taking them out of the gnawing pressure of daily-recurring cares, and setting them in a free place (307-8)

Hence, just as Robert helps Caroline find her identity outside of her social duties, Bronte’s sisters help her find her identity outside of her social life; they help her find her *self*. Moglen traces the bond between the sisters to their childhood stating that after losing their mother, the sisters became dependent on each other from their infancy. She explains,

Their fierce devotion to one another … grew out of their isolation … Their inability to confess to the common hostilities of sibling rivalry, *locked them into painful dependencies* on one another which imprisoned even as they solaced (emphasis added, 20).
However, between December 1848 to May 1849, Bronte loses both her sisters, permanently losing her original community. Like Caroline, Bronte falls into despair. Arguably, what the narrator describes as Caroline’s state of mind after losing Robert’s company is applicable to Bronte’s state after her sisters’ death: “[a]t last the life she led reached the point when it seemed she could bear it no longer” (S. 141). Just as Caroline practices self-restraint and excludes herself from all gatherings, initially, Bronte isolates herself from her well-wishers as well. Detailing how Bronte responds to her friends’ attempt to accompany her in her sorrow, biographer Harman writes,

Ellen Nussey wanted to come and stay at Haworth, but Charlotte turned down the offer, on the harsh principle of needing to endure the worst [alone]. Williams too … was moved by Charlotte’s predicament to suggest she should have a companion to come live with her. She declined this also (297).

Intriguingly, from a thorough analysis of her rejections to such offers, Harman notes that Bronte refuses her friends’ company on the grounds that visitors wouldn’t suit her father, Patrick Bronte, who wasn’t keen on seeing any change in the household at that point. Hence, just as Mr. Helstone intensifies Caroline’s loneliness after her initial loss of Robert’s friendship, Bronte’s father intensifies her loneliness after her loss of Emily and Anne. As Bronte refuses company in real life, Caroline refuses company in the fiction. However, Shirley insists that Caroline welcome her. The narrator states,

Shirley showed she had been sincere in saying she should be glad of Caroline's society, by frequently seeking it; and, indeed, if she had not sought it, she would not have had it, for Miss Helstone was slow to make fresh acquaintance (155).
This passage illustrates that it is Shirley who extends a hand of support to Caroline and not the other way around. According to Harman, Nussey, Taylor, and Williams do the same for Bronte at various points in her life. Ever since Bronte’s school-going days, Nussey and Taylor help Bronte overcome her separation from family (Harman 74). While they become Bronte’s “substitute sisters” (Harman 74) emotionally, it is Gaskell and Martineau who fulfill the gap created in Bronte’s intellectual life by the absence of Emily and Anne. Having received their letters for the first time, Bronte writes to Williams in November of 1849,

I ought to be thankful, and I trust I am, for such testimonies of sympathy from the first order of minds. When Mrs. Gaskell tells me she shall keep my works as a treasure for her daughters, and when Harriet Martineau testifies affectionate approbation, I feel the sting taken from the strictures of another class of critics

To this, Bronte notably adds,

My resolution of seclusion withholds me from communicating further with these ladies at present, but I know how they are inclined to me … the knowledge is present support and perhaps, may be future armour (The Letters 296).

Just as Caroline finally accepts Shirley by rejecting her anti-self and re-embracing her self, through her letters to Williams, Bronte displays signs of finally accepting the fact that a lone and disheartened woman needs help from her social circle. That is, when Williams shares his excitement regarding his daughter’s invitation to Queen’s College for a talk in 1850, Bronte rejoices in witnessing that her friend has provided his young daughter the right atmosphere. She writes,

It does credit both to Louisa’s heart and head that she herself wishes to get this presentation: encourage her wish. Your daughters – no more than your sons – should be a
burden on your hands: your daughters – as much as your sons – should aim at making
their way honourably through life. Do not wish to keep them at home (Letters 226).

The excerpt demonstrates that while Bronte praises Louisa’s ambition and drive, she also
requests the father – multiple times – to help her reach it. In other words, while Bronte praises
the young girl’s realization of her self, she urges her father to provide her with the necessary
community. Hence, Bronte confabulates the pleasure of Emily and Anne’s company in Caroline’s
comfort with Robert. Similarly, she reimagines Nussey, Taylor, and Williams’ company in Mrs.
Pryor’s. Finally, Bronte recreates what she receives from Gaskell and Martineau by introducing
Shirley.

Evidently, by creating communities in Shirley that help her heroine recuperate,
Bronte gives her readers the opportunity to witness how a woman benefits from people who
understand (and are supportive of) her desires and ambitions. Moreover, by creating two
separately functioning communities, Bronte urges men to participate equally in women’s issues
of the day. Like Anderson, Michael D. Lewis claims that political novels often offer a solution to
social problems (244). As a solution, or, in Bronte’s words, “a remedy” to the woman question,
writing Shirley, I argue that Bronte clearly builds a strong case for the urgency of men’s
participation in women’s issues. In chapter twenty-two, very famously, Bronte implants herself
into the narrator and calls upon “Men of England” to take action against gender injustice. The
narrator exclaims,

Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you,
dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids
… Fathers! cannot you alter these things? Perhaps not all at once; but consider the matter
well when it is brought before you, receive it as a theme worthy of thought; do not
dismiss it with an idle jest or an unmanly insult … Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered; they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you. Cultivate them—give them scope and work; they will be your gayest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most faithful prop in age (294).

While Bronte directly addresses the “Men of England” in this passage, she also imbeds androgyny in Shirley. Doing this, I argue, she presents the same plea, but more directly, aiming to make her readers see how a person can help a woman identify her self regardless of their own gender. Creating Robert, Bronte shows how men can help individualistic women prosper and creating Mrs. Pryor, Bronte demonstrates how women can help other women grow. Creating Shirley, a heroine with famously androgynous qualities, Bronte shows that to be part of a woman’s community, gender should not be a point of contention at all.

Shirley’s androgyny is apparent, first, by her masculine name. Introducing her, the narrator states,

Shirley Keeldar (she had no Christian name but Shirley: her parents, who had wished to have a son, finding that, after eight years of marriage, Providence had granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy (151).

Knowing the origins of her name, Shirley often (lightheartedly) assumes a male identity. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, Shirley is frequently “playfully male manqué” (382). Although Mrs. Pryor warns Shirley that all her guests might not be able to appreciate her acceptance of masculinity, Shirley rejoices in identifying herself sometimes as “Captain Keeldar” (155). Explaining how Shirley internalizes her Jungian animus, Drack writes,
Shirley’s assumption of a male position is also reflected in her speech behavior. When talking to men, she is competitive, and the exchanges with the Rector, Mr. Yorke, or her uncle, Mr. Sympson, tend to develop into playful banter or verbal fencing (87).

Hence, a character who is equally male as she is female, Shirley not only provides Caroline with the companionship she had been seeking, but also helps other isolated women in Briarfield. For instance, calling Miss Ainley to Fieldhead citing that she will use Miss Ainley’s “administrative energy” and “executive ability” (S. 214), Shirley makes plans to help the poor by distributing three hundred pounds from her income and making “the hungry fed, the naked clothed, the sick comforted” (S. 215). In addition, Shirley also attempts to place the old maids back to a respectable position in the society. As Belkin observes, working with Shirley, “the women … find means of overcoming the antipathy of the men … [who] despised old maids of the community” (62). Incidentally, Belkin calls Shirley’s task force consisting of Caroline, Miss Ainley, Miss Mann, Hortense, Mrs. Pryor, and Margaret Hall a “small band of women” (62); the term being indicative of my argument that Shirley seeks to provide a community to other women in society as well.

In my opinion, Bronte’s appeal that men should participate equally in matters regarding women’s empowerment originates from her relationship with her brother, Branwell, and publisher, Williams. During her childhood, Branwell provides Bronte the community that Emily and Anne provide in her adulthood. Branwell’s contribution to Bronte’s evolution as an author is widely known. In their childhood, the Bronte children wrote numerous novelettes. While Branwell and Bronte wrote the ‘Angrian saga,’ a body of work set in the imaginary land

87 In Carl Jung’s analytical psychology, ‘animus’ is described as the woman’s masculine inner personality that remains suppressed in her unconscious, like a shadow.
of Angria, Emily and Anne wrote stories by setting theirs in the imaginary land of Gondal.

Heather Glen writes,

Angria had its origin in a series of imaginative ‘plays’ begun the four young Brontes … in the late 1820s, when Charlotte was twelve or thirteen … The children … had together imagined the establishment of a European colony in Africa … Charlotte and Branwell founded the associated kingdom of Angria in 1834 … Charlotte and Branwell continued the ‘plays’ throughout their teens and beyond (xii-xiii).

As Glen’s and numerous other biographical accounts suggest, Bronte honed her skills as a novelist first with her brother. That is, he was her first community. However, due to Branwell’s retirement to alcoholism, she had to detach her intellectual self from his company as did he. Writing to Williams about his death, Bronte tragically informs her publisher that her brother was unaware of his sisters’ success in the literary field. She writes,

My unhappy brother never knew what his sisters had done in literature—he was not aware that they had ever published a line. We could not tell him of our efforts for fear of causing him too deep a pang of remorse for his own time mis-spent, and talents misapplied (Letters 123).

Notably, Bronte recovers the community Branwell provides her through her friendship with her publisher, Williams from 1845 to 1855 (until the year of her death). Harman calls Williams “her most generously sympathetic friend and the recipience of her most heartbreaking letters” (296). While Branwell’s company helped Bronte grow as a writer, her correspondence with Williams indicates that he helped her grow as a reader. Williams, in addition to being a regular provider of books for Bronte also helped her connect with leading literary figures of her day, namely, William Thackeray, Lewis, Gaskell, Martineau, and many others. Immensely
comfortable in his friendship, Bronte frequently offered him advice on raising children. Speaking of Williams, Bronte writes, “he was my first favourable critic; he first gave me encouragement to persevere as an author” (*Life*). Hence, it is evident that both Branwell and Williams contributed to Bronte’s discovery of her *self*. Having benefited, thus, from two notable men and two notable women in her life, Bronte makes not only Shirley, but her entire concept of *community* androgynous suggesting that a woman’s *self* can be (and should be) honed by men and women together.

Taking inspiration from the events and societies in her own life, while Bronte shows support for *communities*, she also skillfully rejects the *anti-communities*. Upon a close-reading of the narrative technique that Bronte adopts to write *Shirley*, one notices the difference between the narrator’s presentation of Caroline’s *community* and her *anti-community*. That is, intriguingly, when Caroline meets members from her *community*, the narrator records her conversations in dialogues rather than long passages of indirect speech. Alternatively, when Caroline converses with members from her *anti-community*, the narrator refuses to record the dialogues in speeches and provides the happenings in indirect speech. For instance, after Caroline is introduced in chapter three, the narrator gives the readers a detailed account of her conversations with Robert Moore. Nearly everything that they talk about is presented in direct speech. On the other hand, when Caroline is around Mr. Helstone, the Sykes women, the curates, and the old maids, their dialogues are mostly absent from the narrative and what is presented to the readers is only an account or a summary of what happened. An apt example of such skillful shift in narrative technique is noticeable at the beginning of chapter five. Before Caroline arrives in the scene, Robert and Hortense talk about her. In this scene, Hortense criticizes Caroline and Robert listens, indicating that Hortense is Caroline’s adversary (a member of her *anti-*
community) and Robert, her ally (a member of her community). Consequently, the chapter divides Caroline’s interaction with Robert and Hortense in two separate pieces: Caroline and Robert’s conversation contains dialogues whereas Hortense and Caroline’s conversation lacks dialogues. Notably, after Robert returns, the narrator brings dialogues back into the scene with him. Similarly, there is also a striking difference between how the narrator records Caroline’s greetings to Robert and the Sykes women. Speaking of the Sykeses’ entry in the drawing-room, the narrator states,

The reception was got through somehow. Caroline ‘was glad to see them’ (an unmitigated fib), hoped they were well, hoped Mrs. Sykes's cough was better (Mrs. Sykes had had a cough for the last twenty years), hoped the Misses Sykes had left their sisters at home well; to which inquiry … the Misses Sykes replied to Caroline by one simultaneous bow … A pause followed. This bow was of a character to ensure silence for the next five minutes, and it did. Mrs. Sykes then inquired after Mr. Helstone, and whether he had had any return of rheumatism, and whether preaching twice on a Sunday fatigued him, and if he was capable of taking a full service now … Pause second … Miss Mary, getting up the steam in her turn, asked whether Caroline had attended the Bible Society meeting which had been held at Nunnely last Thursday night (82).

The only time the narrator records their direct speech is when the Sykes women are speaking to themselves. However, barring a few lines, Caroline’s conversations with them as well the curates go majorly unrecorded in direct speech. When Robert enters the rectory that very evening, the narrator once again presents their entire conversation in direct speech. When

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88 It should be noted that Hortense criticizes Caroline not out of spite but out of care and concern as an elder cousin.
Caroline meets the old maids the very next day, the narrator goes back to an elaborate indirect speech.

In addition to shifting from direct to indirect speech, the narrator also exercises bias when it comes to giving names and backgrounds to characters within Caroline’s community compared to those who are a part of her anti-community. For instance, because Hollow’s Cottage and Fieldhead are Caroline’s homes and their inmates are her communities, the narrator names these houses. Alternatively, the spaces where Caroline’s anti-communities operate in are not given proper names, but only given generic ones like ‘the rectory’ or ‘the mill.’

Arguably, by adopting such narrative techniques, Bronte urges readers to understand that silencing a woman – regardless of the intention behind such silencing – is always detrimental to her. Therefore, as means of reprimanding such behavior, Bronte creates anti-communities in the novel and silences the characters who operate within them by refusing to make them heard as well. Noting how Bronte juxtaposes power with voice in the novel, Belkin notes, “[i]n Briarfield, the silence which cloaks the true feelings and thoughts of its oppressed single women is in direct proportion to their lack of power” (62). Although Belkin’s comment is directly on Caroline’s and other old maids’ general submissiveness and silence in the novel, the observation stands true in a much wider context. Speaking of how Bronte skillfully provides a separate and peaceful ending for Rose Yorke in the novel, Lepine writes, “Bronte seems to imply that if women have their writing scored and censored by men, then an alternative is to subvert male narratives, almost unnoticeably” (133). Similarly, speaking about characters who silence Caroline in the novel, I claim that Bronte seems to imply if women have their voice silenced, then an alternative is to silence those voices instead. Silence, for Bronte, is surely directly linked with powerlessness.
Hence, while some groups silence her heroine, making her weak, Bronte silences those groups, weakening them instead.

Bronte’s presentation of social groups in *communities* and *anti-communities* also opens inroads for readers to perceive her idea on marriage. The marriage at the end of *Shirley*, as I have discussed previously, has been widely censured by critics. Lepine complains that the novel’s closure “unsettlingly traps its two heroines inside the very romance plot conventions it has been contesting” (121). Similarly, in *Tradition Counter Tradition*, Joseph Boone notes, the marriage plot collapses the feminist plot of the novel (14). However, I argue that Bronte’s choice of having her heroines marry suitable men at the end of the novel demonstrate that a woman’s happiness is not independent of her marriage but has to do with whether or not she finds a *community* to marry into. Karen Chase says that *Shirley’s* ending displays that “Bronte is no more a prophet of freedom than she is a priestess of love” (81). Conversely, I believe that writing *Shirley’s* ending, Bronte merges the two concepts together and shows the possibility of finding ‘love’ and ‘freedom’ together.

As Bronte’s letters indicate, Bronte carries a very feminist standpoint on marriage. Speaking of two kinds of marriages – between a man and a rich woman and between a man and a poor woman – Bronte explains to Henry Nussey in 1839,

The wife who brings riches to her husband sometimes also brings an idea of her own importance and a tenacity about what she conceives to be her rights little calculated to produce happiness in the married state. Most probably she will wish to control where Nature and Affection bind her to submit – in this case there cannot I should think be much comfort. On the other hand it must be considered that when two persons marry without money – there ought to be moral Courage and physical exertion to atone for the
deficiency – there should be spirit to scorn dependence, patience to endure privation and energy to labour for a livelihood (Letters 204).

While Bronte seems to be more supportive of the marriage without money, it is evident that in both cases, she holds a feminist stance. When speaking of marriage between a man and a rich woman, she clearly states that with money also comes “an idea of her own importance.” She adds that rather than a woman’s wealth, it is her “strength of mind, firmness of principle and sweetness of temper” that should be considered during a marriage. Significantly, when Shirley and Caroline discuss “domestic relations” (S. 161) between a man and a woman, Caroline asks Shirley if she should ever marry someone like her uncle who would find his wife “agreeable or estimable” at first and “impossible to retain a constant interest” (S. 161) later. To this, Shirley decidedly answers, “if I were convinced that they are necessarily and universally different from us—fickle, soon petrifying, unsympathizing—I would never marry” (161). Shirley further tells Caroline of her belief in gender inequality in a marriage and her inability to see herself in an unequal relationship. She says, “I could never be my own mistress more. A terrible thought! It suffocates me! Nothing irks me like the idea of being a burden and a bore—an inevitable burden” (161). Much later in the novel, when Shirley’s uncle, Mr. Sympson, urges his niece to marry out of love, she exclaims, “Before I marry I am resolved to esteem—to admire—to love” (350). In response, he cries, “Preposterous stuff! indecorous, unwomanly!” (350). Hence, Bronte displays through multiple instances and conversations in the novel that she believes in gender equality in marriage.

While Shirley demonstrates the significance of marrying a person from a community, Mrs. Pryor warns Caroline about marrying someone from anti-community. “There are happy marriages. Where affection is reciprocal and sincere, and minds are harmonious, marriage must
be happy” (284), Mrs. Pryor says. However, when there is lack of such harmony, the old lady states, “Two people can never literally be as one. There is, perhaps, a possibility of content under peculiar circumstances … but it is as well not to run the risk – you may make fatal mistakes” (284) Clearly, for Mrs. Pryor, marrying into an anti-community can even be fatal. While Bronte warns against marrying in the anti-community by having Mrs. Pryor speak against it, she shows the fatal results of such actions by giving an account of the tragic life of Mary Cave. Evidently, Mary Cave dies because she marries a man from her anti-community – Mr. Helstone. In chapter four, the narrator reveals how Mr. Helstone fails as a husband:

Mr. Helstone neither had, nor professed to have … absorbing passion for her. He had none of the humble reverence … Nature never intended Mr. Helstone to make a very good husband, especially to a quiet wife. He thought so long as a woman was silent nothing ailed her, and she wanted nothing. If she did not complain of solitude, solitude, however continued, could not be irksome to her. If she did not talk and put herself forward, express a partiality for this, an aversion to that, she had no partialities or aversions, and it was useless to consult her tastes. … His wife, after a year or two, was of no great importance to him in any shape; and when she one day, as he thought, suddenly—for he had scarcely noticed her decline (39).

Thus, giving a detailed account of how a husband, if he is from a woman’s anti-community, fails to revere and understand her, primarily because he rarely speaks to her effectively, Bronte presents the tale of Mary Cave as a warning for women seeking to marry without much thought on equality. Shirley and Caroline, however, don’t repeat the mistakes committed by Mary Cave or Mrs. Pryor. Shirley marries Louis Moore stating, “there would be no inequality in our union” (278) and Caroline marries Robert Moore, her original community.
According to Nyborg, Shirley and Caroline have “feminized” Robert and therefore, his morality matches with theirs. Hence, both women marry into their communities, thus giving the plot a feminist edge overlooked by many critics.

Bronte’s intimation that women should marry in their community is further explained by the fate she assigns to those women in the novel who fail to either seek or receive a community. Lepine laments that in Shirley, Bronte “fails to imagine a positive end for spinsters” (130). In response, I claim that Bronte doesn’t fail to imagine a positive end, but refrains from giving characters without communities a positive end in the novel. Although Bronte doesn’t blame the old maids for their isolation, she definitely urges them to find communities. Being a fierce advocate for spinsters of England, Bronte writes to her school teacher, Miss Margaret Wooler, in January 1846,

I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be-married women nowadays and I have already got to the point of considering that there is no ore respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own way through life quietly perseveringly – without support of husband or brother and who … retains in her possession a well regulated mind (The Letters 448).

Similarly, when she writes to Williams in July of 1849 noting how she hopes that in her loneliness, she finds educated families around her, Bronte extends this hope for the old maids as well. She writes,

As it is, something like a hope and motive sustains me still. I wish all your daughters – I wish every woman in England had also a hope and motive: Alas! There are many old maids who have neither (The Letters 227).
Therefore, it is evident that Bronte carries deep empathy and respect toward old maids of England. However, despite such compassion, she refuses to give these women a happy-ending in the narrative. In my observation, this signifies Bronte’s warning rather than her negligence. Belkin states that in hiding her rebellious questioning of social norms, Caroline’s submission “comes close to destroying her, as it does so many women in her situation” (57). However, she is rescued by her own set of ‘Men (and women) of England.’ Therefore, Bronte grants her a happy-ending. The only old maid in the novel, aside from Mrs. Pryor, who finds a happy ending in the novel is Margaret Hall. Bronte makes it clear that Miss Hall is happy because she has a community in her brother, Cyril Hall. Mr. Hall is true, simple, frank, with a “nobleness of integrity” (S. 203) who believes his sister is happy because she has “books for pleasure … and her brother for a care” (S. 213). Mr. Hall offers her sister an intellectual companionship and care – just what Bronte perceives a community should grant a woman.

Before a selkie is brought to her anti-home, she remains with her selkie folk, sunbathing in a group by the shores of the North Sea. After she discovers her seal-skin, she makes a choice: whether to stay with her family on land whom she loves, but who compels her to remain in her human state, or to return to the family in the sea who will enable her to live as a seal. Because the family in the sea enables her to embrace her self, the selkie – in every selkie-tale – ultimately chooses them, her community. Similarly, from Jane to Caroline to Lucy, Bronte’s heroines, at the end of their narratives, always receive a choice: whether to live with an anti-community (Jane in India, Caroline an the rectory, Lucy at Madame Beck’s school) or to search for a community. Invariably, Bronte’s heroines choose the latter as well. As demonstrated by Midorikawa and Sweeney’s study on the forgotten female literary friendships of the Victorian period, authors like Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf have verified the
interconnectedness of self and community. Naturally, this is Bronte’s message to her readers through Shirley: in addition to finding a home and your self, also find a community. Reflecting on Bronte’s possible thoughts during Shirley’s composition, Moglen writes,

There is always present in Shirley’s probing analysis of society a haunting cry of personal alienation. One feels that this is the cry that marked the novel’s birth, that the fiction was conceived out of Bronte’s sense, probably quite vague at first, that her misery was part of a larger, complex pain: that the meshes in which she felt herself to be imprisoned represented only a tiny segment of an enormous web in which innumerable others were trapped (154-5).

I feel that Moglen is correct in her assessment. I believe writing Shirley, Bronte sought to free those innumerable prisoners of anti-selves by showing them a glimpse of the powers of communities.

5 CONCLUSION

As my chapters demonstrate, writing Jane Eyre, Shirley, and Villette, Bronte skillfully protests the lack of female subjective experience in prominent Victorian institutions of her time; institutions such as, home, family, the literary circle. In three novels, Bronte writes about women’s engagement with three kinds of spaces that help form these institutions: the home, the female mind that lives inside the home, and her community around that home. Bronte demands that these spaces be redefined because essentially, they are fit only to host her duties and not her desires and ambitions. Consequently, Bronte structures her narratives in a manner that highlights aspects of the Victorian home, the Victorian understanding of the feminine ‘self,’ and the Victorian society that are unfavorable to female subjectivity.
By highlighting these detrimental aspects of common Victorian spaces and ideologies, Bronte showcases her understanding that nineteenth-century norms about gender are problematic. With this observation, I explicate Bronte’s message in three chapters, using three theories: (i) home and anti-home, (ii) self and anti-self, and (iii) community and anti-community.

In the first chapter, I explain Bronte’s conviction that a free-thinking Victorian woman should be in search of a space that is not socially-defined, but personally modeled. In the second chapter, I claim that according to Bronte, to find a personal space, a woman must first detach her social identity from her real, personal self. In the third chapter, I explain Bronte’s contention that to ensure an individualistic female mind endures, her society must be supportive and not restrictive of her desires. To find substantial support for my argument, I turn to British folklore, specifically to the myth of the selkie from Faroese folk tales. In the selkie tales, a selkie (a female seal-human) is forced to move from her original home (the sea) to that of her husband’s (on land). Her inability to accept this new home as her own coupled with her relentless search for means to return to her real home, I believe, compliments Bronte’s narratives impeccably. Since the selkie experiences conflicts regarding her home, her sense of self, and her community, I claim that by reading her mythical tale alongside Bronte’s novels, Bronte’s heroines can be comprehended effectively.

For the Victorians, ‘woman’ and ‘home’ are co-dependent entities. While the woman makes a home, it is the sanctity of the home that makes the woman who she is. The woman represents the home just as much as the home represents the woman who looks after it. As John Ruskin explains in “Of Queen’s Gardens,” the home is where the pure woman is. He writes,
The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial …

But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offense.

This is the true nature of home (44).

The home and the woman are thus, intertwined, as entities that need to be protected as one represents the other. Ruskin adds, “wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her” (44). Consequently, according to Victorian morality, when a woman is at home, she is safe and therefore happy. Conversely, when she is outside the home for an extended, or unnecessary period, she is in danger of being mentally or sexually corrupted. Nineteenth-century essays, verses, fiction, fallen-woman tales, and conduct manuals demonstrate the prevalence and popularity of such mentality. In Bronte’s time, Sarah Stickney Ellis’s series on a woman’s role in domestic life reflects the popular sentiment of the Victorians. A social critic, Ellis published conduct manuals named *The Wives of England* (1834), *The Women of England* (1838), *The Mothers of England* (1841), and *The Daughters of England* (1842), delivering rigid ideas on how a woman should conduct herself. Intriguingly, although a writer of the same time, Bronte questions the effectiveness of such ideas. Writing *Jane Eyre*, Bronte shows that a woman can be physically as well as mentally unsafe in her own home. Writing *Shirley*, she demonstrates that a woman can be weakened to the point of illness by the members of her own home and society. Writing *Villette*, Bronte shows that a woman can succeed socially, financially, as well as emotionally despite an extended period of homelessness. Writing these novels, Bronte clearly showcases the conventional Victorian home’s inability to contain as well as maintain a free-thinking woman.
I present Bronte’s treatment of concepts such as ‘home,’ ‘self,’ and ‘community’ in three chapters. To examine these concepts in relation to Bronte’s depiction, I present my arguments in a carefully chosen sequence. That is, in the first chapter, I interrogate Bronte’s take on Victorian ideologies about home, focusing on *Jane Eyre*. In the second chapter, I discuss the concept of Victorian feminine ‘self’ by examining *Villette*. In chapter 3, I inspect Bronte’s depiction of ‘community’ in *Shirley*. As I introduce the three aforementioned theories in these chapters, I also discuss them one after the other because to understand *community* and *anti-community*, one must first understand *self* and *anti-self*; to understand *self* and *anti-self*, one must first be familiar with *home* and *anti-home*. Hence, it is crucial that I discuss these theories in the sequence they appear in this project, *home* and *anti-home* being the guiding theory of them all. Furthermore, I verify that Bronte thinks home, self, and community not just in the novels I pair each concept with, but in all her works. The only difference is the degree to which she addresses each concept in her three novels. Since *Jane Eyre* best depicts Bronte’s position on ‘home,’ *Villette* best depicts her stance on ‘self,’ and *Shirley* best depicts her position on ‘community,’ the chapters are arranged in order of these theories and not in order of the novels’ publications. I look at Bronte’s women-centric novels and her messages in them comprehensively. For this reason, although Bronte publishes *Jane Eyre, Shirley*, and *Villette* in that order, I discuss *Jane Eyre, Villette*, and then, *Shirley*.

Bronte’s messages through each novel come from her feminist outlook toward life and livelihood. At the same time, they also come from her own experiences. It is therefore very exciting to study how Bronte’s own relationship with the concepts of home, self, and community inspires her narratives. What caused Bronte to write novels where her heroine is either unhappily at home, or homeless? What caused Bronte to create heroines who are unconventional Victorian
women who discard aspects of their personality that are unfavorable and choose to embrace that which is salubrious? What inspired Bronte to think of female subjectivity in relation to her society? The answers, I argue, can be found in Bronte’s life story.

Critics agree that both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are autobiographical. While *Shirley* doesn’t feature Bronte’s personality or story in any sense, it does feature the confabulations of Bronte’s sisters – Emily and Anne. Hence, it is safe to argue that all three novels have significant elements from Bronte’s life in them. For this reason, Bronte unabashedly shares her own history with her homes with Jane Eyre. That is, in her lifetime, Bronte, like Jane, lives in a total of five places that she calls home – Thornton, Haworth, Cowan Bridge, Roe Head, and Pensionnat Heger. Like Jane, Bronte undergoes five prominent experiences in these homes as well. She spends her early years in one (Thornton), gets educated in one (Cowan Bridge), is employed by one (Roe Head), falls in love in one (Pensionnat Heger), and fulfills her greatest aspirations in one (Haworth Parsonage). It is, therefore, no coincidence that Bronte enables Jane to move from one house to the other until she can settle in the one where she too can fulfill her life’s ambitions.

In addition to these parallels, it is evident that Bronte carries deep affection for the space (Haworth) that helps us assume her true self (*self*) – that of a writer.

In my understanding, ‘home’ as a motif appears in Bronte’s work not only because of her fondness for Haworth, but also because in the thirty-seven years that she lives, she spends twelve years away from Haworth, getting multiple opportunities to miss the friendship and freedom Haworth offered her. Evidently, her time away from Haworth (her *home*) makes her see how the other homes fail in comparison. With an exception of Roe Head, Bronte realizes that her other homes are unfavorable to her creative and emotional self, making them her *anti-homes*. For instance, Cowan Bridge becomes Bronte’s first *anti-home*. At eight, she attends the school
with sisters, Maria, Elizabeth, and Emily. The teachers and administrative staff at Cowan Bridge, the infamous Clergy Daughters’ School in Lancashire, torment the sisters and all other children that attend the school, providing poor sanitation and inadequate food. Due to such conditions, Bronte’s eldest sisters, Maria and Elizabeth fall ill and die, compelling Bronte’s father, Patrick Bronte, to retreat his two living daughters from that school. Biographers like Elizabeth Gaskell, Winifred Gerin, Judith Barker, and others unanimously observe the striking similarities between Lowood in *Jane Eyre* and Cowan Bridge. While Cowan becomes Bronte’s *anti-home*, I argue that it is after reaching Roe Head, Miss Wooler’s School for young girls, that she realizes a single home can carry both *home* and *anti-home*. In *Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857), Gaskell verifies this. At first, she states, Bronte dislikes Roe Head, continuously standing by the window and crying (Gaskell 129). In “a desolate condition” (Gaskell 129), Bronte suffers to subsist in a space where she is “sick for home she stood in tears, in a new strange place, among new strange people” (Gaskell 129). However, Margaret Wooler’s kindness and compassion makes Bronte recognize Roe Head as her *home*. Gaskell writes, “The kind motherly nature of Miss W---, and the small number of the girls, made the establishment more like a private family than a school” (Gaskell 130). When Bronte goes to Brussels and lives in Pensionnat Heger, she experiences the clasps of *anti-home* once again. Her letters and compositions from the three years she spends there (1842-44) illustrate how Bronte thinks of the Pensionnat as an *anti-home*. The first three verses of her poem, “Regret” (1843), for example, verify this observation:

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Long ago I wished to leave
“The house where I was born”
Long ago I used to grieve,
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My home seemed so forlorn.
In other years, its silent rooms
Were filled with haunting fears;
Now, their very memory comes
O'ercharged with tender tears.

Life and marriage I have known,
Things once deemed so bright;
Now, how utterly is flown
Every ray of light!
'Mid the unknown sea of life
I no blest isle have found;
At last, through all its wild wave's strife,
My bark is homeward bound.

Farewell, dark and rolling deep!
Farewell, foreign shore!
Open, in unclouded sweep,
Thou glorious realm before!
Yet, though I had safely pass'd
That weary, vexed main,
One loved voice, through surge and blast,
Could call me back again.

It is evident, says critic Salman Akhtar, that the poem carries a sense of nostalgia, a search, and “a failure to find a haven” (101). Truly so, each verse displays the speaker’s lament that their home is not only far, but unreachable. In addition to “Regret” Bronte’s (as well as Emily’s) poems continue to feature ‘home’ as a theme. Moreover, Bronte’s letter to Emily, friend, Ellen Nussey, and father, Patrick, demonstrate how she finds herself in dismal conditions at the Pensionnat. In 1842, Bronte writes to her father from Brussels stating that she undergoes “brief attacks of homesickness” (Life 232) for Haworth Parsonage as well as for England. On her dilemma on returning home, Gaskell states,

[Bronte] resolved to compel herself to remain in Brussels till that [a knowledge of German] was gained. The strong yearning to go home came upon her; the stronger self-denying will forbade. There was a great internal struggle; every fibre of her heart quivered in the strain to master her will; and, when she conquered herself, she remained, not like a victor calm and supreme on the throne, but like a panting, torn, and suffering victim (Life 233).

Of this very feeling, Bronte writes to Emily in an 1843 letter,

I am in low spirits, and that earth and heaven are dreary and empty to me at this moment … everybody is to go home. I know that I am to stay here … and that I shall be much alone during that time, and consequently get downcast, and find both days and nights of a weary length. … I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight at my heart; and I do so wish to go home. Is not this childish? Pardon me, for I cannot help it. … Do not think it is because people are unkind to me that I wish to leave Belgium; nothing of
the sort. Everybody is abundantly civil, but home-sickness keeps creeping over me. I cannot shake it off (Letters 331).

Being in love with her professor, M. Constantine Heger, doesn’t provide her any relief as M. Heger refuses to reciprocate her love and Madame Heger constantly spies on Bronte to interrogate her movements. During this time, Bronte experiences home-sickness and loneliness to a great degree and after years, she relives these moments through Lucy Snowe, giving her readers the memorable chapter before Villette’s second volume where Lucy falls into depression due to her inability to find home and friends during school’s summer vacation. Walking alone and depressed in the streets of Labassecour (the fictional Brussels), Lucy even faints. Margaret Smith states how this scene is directly inspired by Bronte’s own life because in a letter to Emily in 1843, Bronte writes,

I should inevitably fall into the gulf of low spirits if I stayed always by myself here without a human being to speak to, so I go out and traverse the Boulevards and streets of Bruxelles for hours together. Yesterday I went on a pilgrimage to the cemetery … When I came back it was evening, but I had such a repugnance to return to the house… (Letters 329).

Bronte’s “repugnance” evidences the insalubrious nature of the Peninsionnat. In a letter to the same reader a month later, Bronte states, “I should like uncommonly to be in the dining room at home” (Letters 331) and writes, in impeccable detail, about Haworth and what must be going on in the dining room at that moment. She ends the letter stating, “Tell me whether Papa really wants me very much to come home, and whether you do likewise” (331), confirming that she is wanted back home as much as she desires to go there. Such expressions verify Bronte’s ability to compare two homes and see how while one can be a woman’s home where she is
welcome, free, and happy, and the other can be her *anti-home*, where she is restricted and unloved.

In addition to transferring her own experience at Brussels to *Villette*’s narrative, Bronte also builds striking similarities between her relationship with her homes and the heroines’ relationship with theirs. That is, because Bronte doesn’t remember Thornton (as the family moves from there to Haworth when Bronte was just four), her heroines don’t remember or mention their birth homes as well. While Jane and Caroline don’t remember their birth places, Lucy doesn’t want to. Similarly, just as Bronte remembers her early days spent in Haworth, all of her heroines remember their experiences of growing up in their second homes – Jane remembers Gateshead, Caroline remembers the rectory, and Lucy remembers the Bretton house.

Furthermore, due to Bronte’s tormenting experience at Cowan Bridge, two of her heroines attend their respective schools with great difficulties as well – Jane suffers at Lowood and Lucy suffers at Rue Fossette. Ultimately, Bronte goes back to Haworth where she lives until the day she dies. While she finds her *home*, her heroines do the same – Jane finds Ferndean, Caroline finds Hollow’s Cottage, and Lucy finds the girl’s schools. Such similarities between Bronte’s relationship with her homes and her heroines’ relationship with theirs proves that Bronte thinks about the topic very intently and attentively before presenting them in her narratives. Hence, the theory of *home* and *anti-home* that I introduce after reading *Jane Eyre* comes from Bronte’s own life and experiences.

Similar to *home* and *anti-home*, the theory of *self* and *anti-self* finds its inspiration in Bronte’s life as well. Just like her heroines, Bronte experiences the dilemma over choosing between a life of desire and a life of duty. Bronte was twenty-one when she first realizes the problem in Victorian morality regarding gender roles. In 1837, identifying that her ambition to
be a professional writer is far too strong to subdue, Bronte writes to Robert Southey, a prominent poet, a letter containing the following sentence: “sometimes when I’m teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing” (Letters 169). As Southey responds to this letter by a young aspiring female writer, he infamously writes, “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life. It ought not…” (Letters 170). According to Gaskell, Bronte continues to harbor her dream despite the discouraging letter. Eventually, Bronte publishes Jane Eyre under the pseudonym, Currer Bell. On Bronte’s ability to fulfill her desire, Gaskell writes,

Henceforward Charlotte Bronte’s existence becomes divided into two parallel currents--her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Bronte, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character – not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled. (Life 87)

Hence, it is evident that Bronte realizes her self and anti-self as early as 1837.

Unsurprisingly, she transfers her dilemma to her heroines making Lucy constantly aware of the necessity to one day choose between her social self and her private self. Jane struggles to choose between her two lives as well. At Gateshead, she wants to read her book assuming that she is a bird, but her cousin drags her out of her secured space and makes her remember that she is a cousin who is their “slave” (JE 42). She tries to be the passionate speaker at Lowood, but the authorities censure her, calling her “a castaway…an interloper…a liar!” (JE 98). Jane continues to struggle between her private identities and her social ones. Similarly, Caroline is forced to suppress her true identity, that of a conversationalist, multiple times in Shirley’s narrative. While she is free to speak her mind with Robert, Caroline is compelled to hold short conversations with her uncle, his friends, and her guests. Time and again, Caroline thinks carefully about her company and realizes that while she is free to speak with some people, she will always be
unheard by some. As Bronte realizes that a woman, despite carrying ambitions and talents, must suppress her real self and showcase the social one, her heroines display an understanding of the same.

Finally, in 1848 to 1849, Bronte lives through the deaths of her three loving siblings, Branwell, Emily, and Anne, coinciding the composition of *Shirley* with three tragic events. It is then that she realizes how important a *community* is for an individualistic woman. After losing Emily and Anne, Bronte refuses to be in contact with anyone else for an entire year. Eventually, she finds solace by writing to her friends, Ellen Nussey, Mary Taylor, and William S. Williams. She also builds two literary friendships – with Elizabeth Gaskell and Harriet Martineau. Hence, in 1849, Bronte loses her *community*, encounters anti-*community*, and rediscovers her *community*. Around this time, reflecting on the flaws of the social system, Bronte writes to Williams the following words:

> Men begin to regard the position of woman in another light than they used to do; and a few men, whose sympathies are fine and whose sense of justice is strong, think and speak of it with a candour that commands my admiration. They say, however—and, to an extent, truly—that the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves. Certainly, there are evils which our own efforts will best reach; but as certainly there are other evils—deep-rooted in the foundation of the social system—which no efforts of ours can touch: of which we cannot complain; of which it is advisable not too often to think (*Letters*).

These words showcase Bronte’s ability to think keenly on the social system and on men’s role in it. Unsurprisingly, in *Shirley*, she suggests that a woman like Caroline find the right
society that is supportive of her individuality. Hence, Caroline journeys through communities and anti-communities before finding her home.

As evidenced by my biographical criticism of Bronte’s novels, we see that she writes Jane Eyre, Shirley, and Villette as herself. By highlighting women’s issues and narrating women’s perspectives, she writes her novels as a woman. Therefore, I argue that Bronte writes these three novels in her self; not only her experiences, but her concerns and hopes for womanhood appear in her writing. This is the primary reason why my project revolves around Bronte’s women-centric novels. I don’t discuss The Professor (1857) as keenly because it is a novel that reflects Bronte’s anti-self. For this reason, male as well as female characters in The Professor don’t fit the selkie narrative, or the arguments presented in the chapters. The Professor is Bronte’s first novel. However, ever since its completion in 1846, it meets with rejections from seven publishers, including Smith Elder & Co., the publication that eventually published all of Bronte’s later works. The novel, unpopular amidst publishers till Bronte’s death, therefore, remains unseen. Bronte’s husband, Arthur Bell Nicholls, publishes the novel posthumously in 1857 claiming, since Villette and The Professor are “in most respects unlike…I ought not to withhold The Professor from the public” (The Professor xxiv).

The Professor tells the story of William Crimsworth, him being the novel’s first-person narrator, who, after working in miserable conditions under the autocratic Edward Crimsworth (William’s brother), goes to Brussels and secures an occupation of a professor. At Brussels, William confronts several obstacles. In the “Author’s Preface,” Bronte writes,

I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs – that he should never get a shilling he had not earned – that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station; that whatever small
competency he might gain should be won by the sweat of his brow; that, before he could find so much as an arbour to sit down, he should master at least half of the ascent of ‘the Hill of Difficulty’ (*The Professor* xxiii).

Hence, these lines verify that Bronte constructs her hero as well as her narrative carefully, having him embark on a similar journey as *men do*. However, in reality, William Crimsworth’s journey is not a man’s, but Bronte’s own journey disguised in the figure of a man. In his 1896 archival work, *Charlotte Bronte and Her Circle*, Clement King Shorter studies the similarities between the events and places present in *The Professor* and Bronte’s own life. Visiting Brussels, Shorter concludes that Rue d’Isabelle (the school featured in *The Professor*) is an accurate confabulation of Pensionnat Heger. As Bronte timidly but hopefully joined her school in Brussels, William undergoes similar sensations in his early days. Both fall in love with a French teacher (Bronte with Heger and William with Francis Henri) and both skillfully overcome their fear of a new world and a new language. According to Jennifer Ruth, both Bronte and William work for a common cause: intellectual labor can be marketable as well (284). However, despite sharing her story as well as her emotions and ambitions with William, Bronte makes the protagonist a man rather than a woman. Naturally, she fears that her work will be less appealing with a female protagonist in it, showing that her *anti-self* – the will to please society – overcomes her *self* – the will to please herself. While Bronte does invite a feminist woman like herself in the narrative in the name of Francis Henri, she doesn’t give Francis a meaningful backstory or character arch. In words of Helen H. Davis, Bronte hides Francis’s story inside an “*implied narrative*” (193) rather than a real one, making the only narrative of female empowerment in the novel “surreptitious” (Davis 194). She writes,
Brontë herself remarks in a February 5, 1851 letter to her publisher George Smith that “The Professor’s merits, I plainly perceive, will never be owned by anybody but Mr. Williams and me . . . You may allege that that merit is not visible to the naked eye. Granted; but the smaller the commodity the more inestimable its value.” Where is this value, if not visible to the naked eye? Just under the surface narrative, in an implied narrative of female empowerment (194).

While Davis feels that the novel fails because of its inability to nourish Francis Henri, Ruth writes, “The problem is rather that an unresolved tension runs through the novel” (294). Explaining how *The Professor* is about a man struggling to claim that his intellectual wealth is invaluable compared to material wealth, Ruth claims that the novel fails because Bronte tries to do the same – she tries to market her intellectual wealth. She writes,

> the novel produces a professional so market-oriented that it seems, by negation, to trigger a longing for another professional, one more disposed to subordinate the market to higher concerns, one for whom service is not first and foremost transformable into an income-yielding property but is rather service for others without regard for self (298)

Ruth’s observation supports mine that Bronte writes *The Professor* in her anti-self: she doesn’t write what she wants to, by keeping in mind the “higher concerns” as stated by Ruth, but writes what her readers want to read. In that process, Bronte loses a certain degree of authority and earnestness from her novel. Furthermore, despite creating a feminist heroine like Francis Henri who, demands equal pay and speaks openly about her dissatisfaction on not having a profession, Bronte doesn’t set her in a journey like she sets Jane, Caroline, and Lucy. Instead, Francis comes to the narrative as an apparition – visible but indistinct. For this reason, Francis doesn’t stand out as a heroine whose story can be read alongside the selkie’s tale.
“A Selkie Tale” demonstrates how Bronte, a female novelist writing in a male-centric literary sphere of mid-nineteenth-century Britain, delivers three prominent novels that each showcase her ability to address concerns regarding women’s place in society subtly, but strongly. In 1929, Virginia Woolf aptly claims, “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (2). The aim of “A Selkie Tale” is to extend this very idea. Through this project, I claim that eighty-two years before Woolf empowers women writers by demanding that they receive their share of privacy, Bronte writes three novels that collectively claim – if a woman is to live, she must have a home, she must find strength to detach her self from her anti-self, and finally, she must find the right community. Arguably, Bronte signals the wake of feminism in mid-nineteenth-century that Woolf brilliantly intensifies in early twentieth-century.
WORKS CITED


