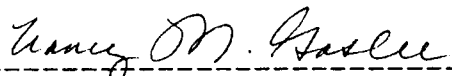


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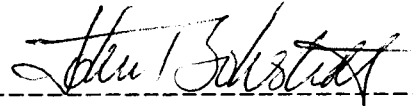
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Peggy Dunn entitled "Authorizing a Self: Models of Self-Construction and Expression in the Texts of Four British Romantic Women Writers." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.



Nancy Goslee, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

**AUTHORIZING A SELF:
MODELS OF SELF-CONSTRUCTION AND EXPRESSION
IN THE TEXTS OF FOUR BRITISH ROMANTIC WOMEN WRITERS**

**A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Peggy Dunn
August 1997**

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Ernie Wayne Dunn and Opal Dunn

(who read to me)

and to my husband

Eric Bailey

(who reads with me).

ABSTRACT

This work explores strategies of authorship and authorization--of self and text--in Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Charlotte Bronte's Villette, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh. It examines how these strategies mark each author's text as Romantic and interrogates how these strategies facilitate self-formation and expression.

Issues of selfhood (its formation, boundaries, power) are central to Romanticism. At the center of Romanticism is a speaking "I," a self which perceives and creates, defines and orders, and, often, defies. Does it make a difference when that speaking "I" is a woman? Yes, it does, and the manifestations and significance of this difference are observable in the four works under consideration.

These four authors' central concerns, themes, images, and strategies mark them and their texts as Romantic and, at the same time, suggest the influence of the lived experience of gender difference in a world in which man is Man and woman is Other. Ultimately, what marks these four texts as being written by Romantic women writers is the exploration of issues relating to selfhood which are often left unexplored, or not dealt with as explicitly, in the texts of the most frequently canonized male Romantics. Smith, Shelley, Bronte, and Barrett Browning make gender, class, economic and political deprivation, parental nurture

(or, more specifically, the lack thereof) matter when it comes to who and what we are (what formed the self), and who or what we may hope to be or do (what power this self really has).

Reading these four texts together, one may discern a continuum of subject positions available within Romantic discourse for the woman writer. As Smith does, she may find a voice for her victimization. As Shelley does, she may critique/revise some aspect of Romanticism itself. As Bronte does, she may highlight the difference gender and class make to the Romantic self. As Barrett Browning does, she may lay claim to the position and power of the Romantic bard. Within Romanticism, these four Romantic women writers found self-making--as both narrative theme and narrative project--possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1:	
"Always Nightingales, Always Sad Songs": Charlotte Smith's <u>Elegiac Sonnets</u>	23
CHAPTER 2:	
Self-Making and Monster-Building in Mary Shelley's <u>Frankenstein</u>	60
CHAPTER 3:	
"I, Lucy Snowe": Romantic Subjectivity in <u>Villette</u>	100
CHAPTER 4:	
The Voice of the Bard: <u>Aurora Leigh</u> and Romantic Self-Making	164
CONCLUSION	217
BIBLIOGRAPHY	221
VITA	233

INTRODUCTION

This work explores strategies of authorship and authorization--of self and text--in Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Charlotte Bronte's Villette, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh. It examines how these strategies mark each author's text as Romantic and interrogates how these strategies facilitate self-formation and expression (of author or character or both).

As I will discuss in more detail below, issues of selfhood (its formation, boundaries, power) are central to Romanticism. At the center of Romantic discourse is a speaking "I," a self which perceives and creates, defines and orders, and, often, defies. This self is creatively powerful, often marvelously egotistical. Traditionally, this self has been perceived as having a gender, and, as many scholars have noted, that gender is masculine.¹ Does it make a difference when that "speaking 'I'" is a woman? Yes, it does, and the manifestations--and significance--of this difference are at the heart of my exploration of these four authors and their texts.

As I will argue in the individual chapters, these four authors' central concerns, themes, images, and strategies

¹See, for example, Mellor's introduction to Romanticism and Feminism and her Romanticism and Gender, Curran's "The I Altered," Homans' Women Writers and Poetic Identity and Bearing the Word.

mark them and their texts as Romantic; at the same time, however, these concerns, themes, images, and strategies suggest the influence of the lived experience of gender difference in a world in which man is Man and woman is Other. All four of these writers are, to borrow a phrase from Margaret Homans, "textually conscious of their femininity" (WW&PI 3). Even when they attempt to conceal it (through anonymous or pseudonymous publication, for example), their narratives betray them--either because (as is the case with Smith) the voice is so obviously a woman's voice, "prey to victimization" (Curran, "The I Altered" 199), or because the author/speaker feels and demonstrates such an intense need for self-authorization, as if she must justify her very presence, her very voice. But, finally, what marks these texts as being written by female Romantic writers is the exploration of issues relating to selfhood which are often left unexplored, or not dealt with as explicitly, in the texts of the most frequently canonized (at least in this century) male Romantics.

Smith, Shelley, Bronte, and Barrett Browning make gender, class, economic and political deprivation, parental nurture (or, more specifically, the lack thereof) matter when it comes to who and what we are (what formed the self), and who or what we may hope to be or do (what power this self really has). They make these issues relevant and they make them real, even to the point of literally incorporating

them in their narratives. Just as the Creature is the literal embodiment of Victor Frankenstein's Promethean aspirations in Mary Shelley's text, for example, Aurora both experiences and is the revelation with which Elizabeth Barrett Browning "ends" her text (and signals its narrative non-closure at the same time).

Charlotte Smith, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Bronte, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning certainly wrote other significant works as well as the ones discussed in this dissertation; however, I have chosen to discuss these four texts for particular reasons. Elegiac Sonnets was Charlotte Smith's first publication, and Smith's addition of poems and prefaces as it went through expanding editions allows us to trace the evolutionary process of authorial self-construction. Also, despite the fact that Smith was driven to write for material survival (her own and her dependent children's) and that her novels tended to be more profitable,² she continued to write and revise her Elegiac Sonnets up to the year she died, suggesting that the sonnets continued to be her chosen form of self-expression. Similarly, Frankenstein was Mary Shelley's first publication; in it, we may discern the birth of authorial self. Furthermore, Shelley (like Smith) chose to revisit her first text, revising parts of the novel and affixing an

²See Judith Phillips Stanton's "Charlotte Smith's 'Literary Business': Income, Patronage, and Indigence."

introduction designed to construct a particular image of herself as a woman writer. Villette, on the other hand, is Charlotte Bronte's last novel and not as well known as Jane Eyre. Villette is Bronte's most mature work--not although but because it is her most demanding, and even her most "messy," novel. It is "messy" not just because of its narrative perspective (discussed in Chapter 3) and its lack of happily-ever-after closure, but because, in Villette, Bronte seems confident enough of herself as an author to highlight what she is not confident about--the possibility of a union between female Romantic subjectivity and domestic love, between woman-as-autonomous-subject and woman-as-wife. Finally, as an epic written by a woman writer (and chronicling the growth of a woman writer), Aurora Leigh presented itself as exceptionally fertile ground for exploring the issue of female Romantic self-construction.

I discuss ways in which we may discern an author, text, and/or character as Romantic on a chapter-by-chapter basis; however, a more general discussion of my criteria for such judgments follows.

In discussing a text, character, and/or author as Romantic, I rely upon distinguishing characteristics more than dates; however, I do not advocate a completely ahistorical approach. While "romantic" could very well describe the temperament of a person living in a number of cultures or time periods, British literary Romanticism does

have a matrix, but a matrix with permeable boundaries. Attempts to impose boundaries have typically served to draw attention to their artificiality.³ The traditional approach has been to associate the birth of Romanticism with the stirrings of revolution--social, political, economic, industrial--in the late eighteenth century.⁴ And, indeed, each text I consider is "revolutionary," often in more than one way. Still, in discussing these authors and texts and classifying them as Romantic, I have been concerned not so much with the question "When did she write?" as with "What--and why--did she write?" In other words, I read Romanticism as a conceptual category--not rather than, but more than, an historical period. Texts, characters, and authors are Romantic due to their central concerns, themes, methods.

Despite the fact that the writers we call the British Romantics did not call themselves "Romantics" and did not

³For example, in his introduction to English Romantic Poetry and Prose, Russell Noyes states: "The European Romantic Movement covered a span of approximately a hundred years from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth" (xix). David Perkins cites "[t]he half-century from approximately 1775 to 1830," then mentions the narrower "conventional" period of 1800-30 (which he sees as "far from adequate") (1). The introduction to the Romantic period included in the Norton Anthology (6th ed., Vol. 2) gives us: "the span between the year 1785, the midpoint of the decade in which Samuel Johnson died and Blake and Burns published their first poems, and 1830, by which time the major writers . . . were either dead or no longer productive" (Abrams 1).

⁴Again, refer to Abrams (Norton 1-17), Noyes, and Perkins. Bloom even asserts that "[t]he French Revolution . . . is the single most important external factor that conditions Romantic poetry" (xiv).

see themselves as unified in theory or practice,⁵ there are commonalities among them. Traditional hallmarks of Romanticism include: a focus on the individual (particularly the disempowered, alienated, and/or oppressed individual); an emphasis on that individual's innate dignity (and/or beauty, goodness, wisdom, etc.) and the validity of his/her worldview; an emphasis on the beauty and significance of the "common" (as seen in Wordsworth's assertion: "To me the meanest flower that blows can give/ Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears"⁶); a depiction of the creative process as organic (self-originating and self-organizing, according to Coleridge) and driven by inspiration and emotion (preferably, for Wordsworth, emotion "recollected in tranquillity"); thus, a depiction of the poet as bard, visionary, intermediary between human beings and the Infinite. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Romantic poets/writers are commonly committed, though in various forms, to the ideals of revelation, revolution (particularly in ways of seeing oneself and the

⁵As Bloom points out, "The useful term 'Romantic' . . . was not employed until the later Victorian literary historians looked back at the early years of the nineteenth century" (xvi). And regarding cohesion in theory or practice among the Romantics, Byron's open ridicule of his poetic contemporaries (except for P. Shelley) is noteworthy, as is his dismissal of the poetry of his time: "we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself" (qtd. in Abrams, Norton 480).

⁶the final lines of Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality Ode*.

world), and reintegration (within oneself, between oneself and Nature or God or what Percy Shelley simply calls "power," between oneself and one's world).

Another way of conceptualizing Romanticism as a literary movement is to read it as a reaction to (or against) Neoclassicism. While Neoclassical ideology privileges reason and order, Romanticism insists upon the primacy of emotion, the purity and power of passion. While the Neoclassicist sees nature as fairly mechanistic, the Romantic sees it (or, quite often, "her") as organic and frequently contemplates his/her relationship to/with nature. Human beings who take themselves a bit too seriously are sure to find themselves at the wrong end of the Neoclassical satirist's pen, but Romantic literature is replete with speakers and characters unashamedly bent on exploring their own minds and experiences and expressing their emotions in all their intensity. This last characteristic may well be what leads some people to suspect that one of the typical manifestations of the "spiritual essence of Romanticism" is "a passion . . . for talking exclusively about oneself" (Lovejoy 5). In Romantic literature, the quest for self is a recurring motif, and the Romantic self is, as I have already mentioned, often presented as creatively powerful, a veritable law unto itself.

Influenced by post-Kantian philosophy, the Romantics saw the human mind not merely as a mirror, receiving and

reflecting back an already-formed reality, but as a creator of that reality.⁷ In other words, the human mind took on attributes previously associated with the divine. Thus, it should be no surprise that out of Romanticism came such a focus on the self--its formation, its power and potentiality. Blake created his own mythology, convinced that, as Los (his "fallen" Zoa) proclaims, "I must Create a System or be enslaved by another Man's." Wordsworth devoted his epic The Prelude to chronicling his own experiences and growth as a poet. Coleridge's poetry and his autobiography/philosophical treatise/work of literary criticism, Biographia Literaria, focus to a large extent on the mind's creative potential, the "shaping spirit of Imagination." The Byronic Hero--that moody, haunted, rebel/victim who, defiant to the end, stands perpetually in the midst of storm with his cloak whipping around him--obviously continues to intrigue us (why else the perpetual reincarnations?). Percy Shelley's Prometheus, simultaneously unrepentant transgressor and suffering god-in-ruins, exerts a similarly powerful yet dangerous (powerful because dangerous?) charm, as Mary Shelley demonstrates in Frankenstein. And Keats, despite his theories regarding "Negative Capability" and

⁷For a full discussion of this element of Romantic thought see M.H. Abrams' The Mirror and the Lamp.

"poetical Character,"²⁶ wrote poetry so infused with intermixed desires for spiritual transcendence and for luxurious, sensual immersion in life that it seems fruitless to tell students that, when they read it, they do not (or should not) hear the voice of John Keats himself--"half in love with easeful Death"²⁷ and half in love with earthly life. In effect, John Keats becomes a type of Romantic "hero"--the sensitive and doomed young genius, haunted by his own conflicted yearnings, fighting valiantly but losing his battle with time.

Although my criteria for reading an author, text, and/or character as Romantic are, to a large extent, based on traditional concepts of Romanticism, my reading strategies and my theoretical framework have been and are strongly influenced by feminist thought and post-structural ideas of subjectivity. This is not the mismatch it might first appear to be, however, for I find common ground between these classical models of Romanticism and both feminism and post-structuralism.

Associating Romanticism with essentialism, the

²⁶Keats held that to be a great artist, a writer should maintain a type of selfless receptivity. He discusses Negative Capability ("when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason") in a letter to his brothers George and Thomas dated December 21/27, 1817, and his belief that "A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity. . ." in a letter to Richard Woodhouse dated October 27, 1818.

²⁷from Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," line 52.

silencing of women and/or the "appropriation of the feminine" (Richardson), and an abstract idealism unconcerned with the literal, material reality of women's oppression, "[f]eminist theory has," as Julie Ellison observes, "exhibited sustained dislike for the romantic" (11).

However, such associations ignore the shared concerns of Romantic and feminist thought. As Ellison points out:

feminism and romanticism share an anxiety about aggression and violence; a critique of authority; a commitment to the cognitive validity of feeling and atmosphere; an identification with the victim; an intrigue with the construction and deconstruction of subjectivity. . . . Given this large and endlessly disputable common ground, can one say that feminism is not romantic? Or that a feminist ethics is not descended from the gendered figurations of romantic criticism? (11)

I would add (or at least state more explicitly) that, at their best, both Romanticism and feminism go beyond "identification with the victim" and an "intrigue with the construction . . . of subjectivity." Romanticism, as I have already stated and will argue in greater detail in Chapter 4, is dedicated to re-imagining life as we know it, to individual and social renewal, to revolution-from-within. Feminism, as I conceive of it and experience it, has the same (or, at least, similar) aspirations. While I would not

argue that Romanticism is specifically feminist in its aims, projects, and ideals, I would argue that it is, with its focus on the individual and on the revolutionary potential of the individual human mind, much more fertile ground for feminist goals than it is often perceived as being.

Despite what may appear at first glance to be anti-theoretical theories of selfhood, Romanticism and post-structuralism share common ground as well. In her introduction to Romantic Identities, Andrea K. Henderson outlines post-structural paradigms of subjectivity which would seem to be foreign to Romanticism:

From Derrida's insistence on the logical impossibility of complete self-presence, to Lacan's description of the subject as barred, the sign of a lack, to Althusser's claim that subjectivity is the result of ideological interpellation, post-structuralism, loosely defined, has challenged the belief in [the Wordsworthian concept of] "the depth of human souls" from several angles. (3)

However, arguing against the charge that Romanticism posits only one form of identity (an essential, "deep" self), Henderson notes that "the 'egotistical sublime' of The Prelude, although challenged in its day, still serves as a touchstone for Romanticism as a whole" (2), obscuring the fact that "[t]he Romantic era saw the production of a

diversity of models for understanding subjectivity, a diversity that often goes unnoticed in our tendency to focus on the depth model. . ." (3).

This diversity of models for understanding subjectivity is central to what I see as potential common ground for Romantic and post-structural concepts of the self. My interest in and emphasis on the process of identity formation (rather than the assumed fixed-ness of self or text, or even literary "period") is characteristic of post-structuralist thought, but a privileging of process over product is arguably Romantic as well.¹⁰ Post-structuralism's focus on indeterminacy/excess of meaning, openness and self-reflexivity of structures, and deconstruction of binaries informs my approach to the texts and authorial strategies of Smith, Shelley, Bronte, and Barrett Browning. In much Romantic literature (not, I would argue, only the four texts I consider here or only texts by female Romantic writers), the self is depicted as, if not indeterminate, certainly mysterious; always more than the sum of its parts, the site of spontaneous inspiration, susceptible to outside influence, it defies boundaries and resists completion. Furthermore, as I will argue in more detail in Chapter 4, the "deconstruction of binaries" is a

¹⁰Consider, for example, the frequency of Romantic "fragments," the conceptualization of Nature and art as organic (thus, growing/changing form perpetually), the focus on the necessary and interdependent stages of human growth.

Romantic project. Reintegration, synthesis, reconciliation of opposites--ironically, the very projects/ideals of Romanticism which signal its revolutionary potential--can be read as evidence of appropriation, disrespect for difference, an egotistical drive to dominate or absorb.

Finally, however, post-structuralism may attack the very concept of self-identity as a fiction. At this point, my post-structuralist hermeneutics of suspicion gives way to my investment in Romantic ideology. First of all, I wonder what the real alternatives are if one is not willing or able to construct (or reconstruct, or at least revise) a self. The acceptance of a ready-made self, becoming more subject-ed than subject, is one "alternative" that comes to mind. Secondly, it seems to me just as unlikely that we are completely formed/called into being by external, social forces (and language) as it does that such forces have no determining influence upon who and what we become, unlikely that language is instrumental in the creation of subjection but cannot facilitate self-constructed subjectivity. And, finally, the argument that agency is itself a construct and self-construction therefore an illusion reminds me somehow of a comfortable homeowner, sitting by her fire on a winter evening, telling herself (and others) that losing one's home is inconsequential--it has no intrinsic value, is not necessary to/for her; she will survive without one or live in the homes of others if such an eventuality occurs. Such

cerebral nonchalance is the luxury of comfortable homeowners.

.

When one possesses a sense of self both autonomous and creatively powerful, and when language is a gift one cannot remember not having, self-expression seems an easy task. Words are a fluid medium through which thoughts can flow unhindered and those thoughts arise spontaneously, provoked by nature or conversation or reading. But when one (perhaps not yet "one") is in the process of self-construction, as individual or as artist, self-expression is a perilous task. For self-construction and self-expression can be perplexedly simultaneous projects.

In Elegiac Sonnets, Charlotte Smith authorizes herself as a speaking/writing subject through suffering. Insisting upon the reality of that suffering, she claims the right to speak/write of it, and, ultimately, to speak/write (of) herself.

Her angst-ridden verse exhibits many typically Romantic characteristics (discussed in detail in Chapter 1), but it is her choice of form which may first draw our attention. In her use of the sonnet form, she appropriates a genre traditionally claimed by males. From Petrarch to Donne, the sonnet lent itself primarily to the expression of male passion and desire. But in Smith's hands, the sonnet is the vehicle for the expression of female victimization,

alienation, and despair, and the afore-mentioned typically Romantic characteristics take on different, specialized meanings as well. When Smith invokes the image of the nightingale, for example, this invocation resonates with meaning. We think of Philomela, of the violation of the female body and the silencing of the female voice.

In Elegiac Sonnets, Smith expresses her victimization, both in the sonnets themselves and in the prefaces to the numerous editions. Such an immersion in the role of victim may be read as anything but empowering, but in and through the very expression of that victimization, Smith rhetorically constructs a self that can resist victimization in its most pernicious form--annihilation of self through silencing of voice. Smith accomplishes this resistance by transmuting suffering into song. The most fitting symbol for her is not Prometheus who steals but Philomela who is stolen from, yet continues to sing. Authoring and authorizing herself through suffering, Charlotte Smith reclaims her tongue.

In Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the victim of tyranny, not satisfied with mere complaint, strikes back--and talks back. Shelley grants the Creature what seems to be a degree of agency which the speaker in Smith's sonnets never attains. However, the Creature's articulate self-expression does him little good. He is finally unable to construct (or re-construct) a self acceptable to either his creator or

himself. Frankenstein is, of the four texts discussed, the most cautionary regarding the potentialities and consequences of self-making. With its focus on self-making, and its critique of irresponsible authority, the tyranny of oppressor over victim, and the dangers of uncontrolled technology (human disregard for and metaphoric rape of Nature), Frankenstein is a Romantic text; however, it is also a direct critique of one element of Romanticism.

Prometheus, the quintessential rebel/victim and, according to Percy Shelley, "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature,"¹¹ is invoked by Mary Shelley in the very title of her novel. But Victor Frankenstein, "the modern Prometheus," is depicted as anything but heroic. He may picture himself as the champion of humankind, but his supposedly high and selfless goals are a thin mask for his egomania. Consumed by dreams of doing what no man has ever done, he aspires to have god-like powers of creation and annihilation. Victor quite literally plays with fire, but, unfortunately, he is not the only one burned. His utter self-absorption and arrogance leads to the destruction of his family, his friends, and, finally, his Creature, the literal embodiment of his Promethean aspirations.

In Frankenstein, Mary Shelley reveals the potentially

¹¹from P. Shelley's preface to Prometheus Unbound, composed in 1818-19, published in 1820.

destructive consequences of irresponsible self-making. But, I would emphasize, her cautionary critique does not amount to a dismissal of Romanticism. Victor is the father of destruction not because he believes in self-making, but because he desires it for the wrong reasons, and because he fails to combine his desire with an understanding of at least two other central tenets of Romanticism--the interconnectedness of all life and the innate value of such life, even in its most "common," or externally unaesthetically pleasing, forms.

Finally, while in Frankenstein Mary Shelley registers her trepidation regarding Promethean aspirations, she also accomplishes some self-making of her own. The novel she once referred to as her "hideous progeny" speaks volumes about the struggle to construct and express a self within a culture which presupposes one's inferiority, even one's non-subjectivity. Mary Shelley and the nameless Creature must both struggle through language to construct and express selves which are radically at odds with preconceived notions regarding who and what they essentially are. Mary Shelley, however, is more successful in her struggle than her Creature is in his, and the strategies which lead to this success are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

And thus we come to Charlotte Bronte's Villette, a gothic bildungsroman of one woman on a quest for selfhood. Both Frankenstein and Villette are psychic autobiographies,

revealing their authors' simultaneous investment in Romanticism and their suspicion, fear, or skepticism regarding some of its central projects/ideals.

Whereas the Creature's response to tyranny is to seek revenge, Lucy Snowe internalizes oppression to such an extent that it erupts in scenes of gothic horror. Bronte could have found no better medium through which to communicate the female struggle for Romantic subjectivity than the Gothic. All gothic heroines live in an environment of constant, though often unidentifiable, threat. This threat is not just loss of life but loss of self-- frequently symbolized by rape or transgression of the limits of female sexuality (i.e., moving from object of desire to desiring subject). The Romantic subject is often one who dares to desire that which is forbidden. What Lucy dares to desire is autonomy and romantic/domestic love; she desires to reconcile two experiences or states of being often conceptualized as oppositional for women.

Lucy's Romanticism is made evident by her quest for selfhood, her desire for the forbidden, her impulse toward the reconciliation of opposites, and other qualities I discuss in depth in Chapter 3; throughout much of her text, however, Lucy is a Romantic in denial. Passion, imagination, receptivity to the influences of nature threaten Lucy's sense of self-control. Since she sees self-control as essential to self-construction, she exerts much

of her energy attempting to disown and deny parts of the very self which she is in the process of building.

Her possibilities for subjectivity restricted by both her gender and her class,¹² Lucy undertakes the writing of her autobiography. In so doing, she quite literally writes her life--emphasizing some elements, obscuring others, she constructs a self through narrative, yet, intriguingly, does not give her text her name. Similarly, Charlotte Bronte published Villette pseudonymously in 1853--three years after she had revealed the true identities of the Bells in a biographical notice. Why, then, use the pseudonym again? Like Charlotte Smith's prefaces (and Mary Shelley's introduction to the 1831 edition of her novel¹³), the use of the pseudonym allows the author, like T.S. Eliot's Prufrock, to "prepare a face to meet the faces that [she] meet[s]," and to signify and authorize herself as a woman writer. It allows Bronte to do the equivalent of what Aurora Leigh does when she tells Romney, "I'm an artist, sir/ And woman. . . ." (Barrett Browning 306-07).

¹²Lucy Snowe is a governess-turned-teacher (as Charlotte Bronte was) and, as such, the site of conflict regarding female subjectivity. As a woman who works for a wage (rather than one dependent upon husband or father for sustenance--and governance), she threatens the separate-spheres ideology and provokes all manner of fears regarding the stability of a class and gender system built upon the concept of the "naturalness" of women's subordination. See Poovey's Uneven Developments.

¹³Frankenstein was first published anonymously in 1818. I discuss the significance of this initial self-veiling by a young woman author in Chapter 2.

While Villette is the narrative of a female Romantic subject-in-process, in Aurora Leigh, Elizabeth Barrett Browning adds yet another layer of complexity: Aurora is a female Romantic poet-in-process. She, too, struggles to negotiate the conflicts created by gendered versions of subjectivity. She, like Lucy, desires autonomy, and she comes to desire romantic/domestic love. But, unlike Lucy, Aurora chooses to work, not to survive materially but to answer a call. Aurora perceives of poetry as her vocation, a high calling. Furthermore, while Lucy (and, I would argue, Bronte) will not write what she cannot imagine, the unambiguous "happy ending" (the marriage of Lucy and Paul, of female autonomy and domestic affection, of woman as self-constructed subject and woman as wife), Aurora can imagine such a marriage as a possibility, and as part of her vocation.

Dedicated to the Romantic ideals of revelation, revolution, and reintegration, Aurora Leigh is, of the four works discussed here, the most Romantic in form and content. It chronicles the growth of Aurora as a female Romantic bard/heroine and narratively facilitates the construction of her transformed self. Confronted with oppositional paradigms (love/art, realism/idealism, materialism/spirituality), Aurora's (and Barrett Browning's) approach is to reconcile them, to make them not opposites but complements. Maintaining a radically egalitarian vision,

Barrett Browning then goes to great pains to demonstrate that while each will retain its individual "identity," a revolutionary new entity will be formed.

At the conclusion of Aurora Leigh, there is the promise of marriage, and, as I will show in Chapter 4, it is not just the marriage of Romney and Aurora. As Aurora heralds the dawn, she both describes and summons the New Jerusalem, just as, through the writing of her own text (a text to which she, unlike Lucy Snowe, gives her own name), she narrates and constructs herself--as woman-writer.

The quest for selfhood is perilous enough; the quest for artistic selfhood is treacherous beyond imagination. In these four works, we have what Cora Kaplan has called an "endless narration of the self, through the mixed incoherence of subjectivity spoken from subordinate and rebellious positions within culture" (172). Much of Romantic literature is devoted to this endless narration of the self, and to making coherent that which is diffuse; this does not mean, however, that within Romanticism there is just one narrative, or just one position available from which to speak/write it. Reading these four texts together, one may discern a continuum of subject positions available within Romantic discourse for the woman writer. As Charlotte Smith does, she may find a voice for her victimization. As Mary Shelley does, she may critique/revise some aspect of Romanticism itself. As Charlotte

Bronte does, she may draw attention to the material difference gender and class make to the Romantic self. As Barrett Browning does, she may lay claim to the position, power, and vision of the Romantic bard, redefining the gender of the speaking "I." Within Romanticism, Smith, Shelley, Bronte, and Barrett Browning found self-making--as both narrative theme and narrative project--possible.

CHAPTER 1

"Always Nightingales, Always Sad Songs":
Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets

Charlotte Smith has experienced a resurrection of sorts in the last few years. It is sadly ironic that a woman whose name and work were respected by many contemporaries and successors should need not only resurrection but vindication on many fronts. But perhaps this need for vindication should come as no surprise. In "The Traffic in Women Poets," Donna Landry, reviewing Roger Lonsdale's anthology Eighteenth Century Women Poets, cites the two questions that inevitably confront at one time or another those who express an interest in eighteenth century women poets: one, identified by Lonsdale, is the politely skeptical "Were there any?"; the other, added by Landry, is the sometimes unasked but often implied "Were they any good?" One of the assumptions underlying this second question is the belief that, surely, if they were "good," we would all still be reading them. The naivete at the root of this assumption is understandable given that so many of us were taught that "great literature" or "classics" were simply those works which had survived the so-called test of time. And while this may still sound like a valid criterion for some, the problem is that time is not the only test which the written word must pass. Political climate, aesthetic judgment (often highly subjective and always affected by the culture and ideology of the time), and, most

importantly in terms of the focus of this dissertation, preferred and privileged representations of the nature and the power of the self all come to bear upon works of literature and help decide which ones survive that much-heralded "test of time."

The written word is a powerful tool, perhaps the most powerful, for the creation and reinforcement of ideas of the nature and power of the self. Canonized literature can serve as an extension and embodiment of a dominant group's world view--reflecting, sustaining, and recreating existing power relations. Mellor makes a powerful statement regarding this function of literature in her introductory essay to Romanticism and Feminism:

The critical canonization of only six of the literally hundreds of male and female writers of the early nineteenth century reflects certain assumptions deeply imbedded in our political culture. These six male poets [Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats] have been heralded because they endorsed a concept of the self as a power that gains control over and gives significance to nature, a nature troped in their writings as female. They thus legitimized the continued repression of women and at the same time gave credence to the historically emerging capitalist belief in the primacy of the individual

over the group. Moreover, as poets rather than prose-writers, they upheld a hierarchical ordering of the arts inherited from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, a hierarchy that reinforced the elite . . . in other words, those males wealthy enough to gain an education at private schools and universities. (8)

While I do not agree that all six of the poets being discussed uniformly "endorsed a concept of the self as a power that gains control over . . . nature," Mellor's point regarding canonization as the stamp of approval on specific representations of the self, its nature, and its power is well-made. Much of the literature of the Romantic period canonized for the greater part of this century (or at least in the second half) presented to the reader a self which was angst-ridden yet creatively powerful. This highly individualized self--possessor of inalienable rights and defier of tyrants--continues to attract us. It continues to attract us so much that often we seem to forget the historical specificity of this representation of the self in order to herald it as "universal"--this, we are told (or tell ourselves), is the essential nature of humankind: creative, powerful, autonomous. As Joanna Russ points out, this type of privileging of certain types of discourse, certain depictions of the self, leads to "associations of art with virility, quality with size, and authenticity with

self-aggrandizement" (206). And the issue of authenticity is particularly cogent when one is discussing women's writing.

As Russ points out in "Anomalousness," an excerpt from How to Suppress Women's Writing, particular statements tend to haunt women writers (and those who study them):

She didn't write it.

She wrote it, but she shouldn't have.

She wrote it, but look what she wrote about.

She wrote it, but "she" isn't really an artist and
"it" isn't really serious, of the right genre--
ie., really art.

She wrote it, but she wrote only one of it.

She wrote it, but she's only interesting/included
in the canon for one limited reason.

She wrote it, but there are very few of her. (194)

Of the preceding indictments, the fourth and sixth are probably the two most often leveled, in one form or another, against Charlotte Smith. Articulated or unarticulated, the resistance to Smith's poetry often comes down to a sense on the part of some readers that Smith's Elegiac Sonnets simply are not as artistically appealing as, say, Wordsworth's sonnets, particularly those written in the first decade of the nineteenth century ("The world is too much with us," "London, 1802," "It is a beauteous evening," etc.). And here we come to Smith's significance as poetic predecessor

and to the heart of the sixth indictment. Some scholars will grant Smith a footnote in literary history as a poetic predecessor to Wordsworth in the use of the sonnet form, but until recently her recognition as an important figure in English literature began and ended with that footnote. Given this tendency of dismissal, it is worthwhile to re-contextualize, and more fully contextualize, Charlotte Smith and her Elegiac Sonnets.

In 1784, Charlotte Smith published the first edition of her Elegiac Sonnets; by 1800, Elegiac Sonnets had gone through nine expanding editions. These editions were highly regarded by many critics and contemporaries and were very popular, as the multiple printings attest. In a review in the April 1786 edition of The Gentleman's Magazine, one critic asserted that Smith had "undoubtedly conferred honor on a species of poetry which most of her predecessors ha[d] disgraced"; in a December 1792 edition of The Universal Magazine, another insisted that "[i]n the epic Milton triumphs without a rival, in the drama Shakespeare, in the sonnet Charlotte Smith" (Whiting 7). And her achievements did not go unnoticed by contemporary poets, either. Samuel Taylor Coleridge admired her sonnets, even to the point of taking them (along with the sonnets of Bowles) as models for his own poetry (Whiting 7). Southey and Scott admired her work (Hunt 85). We also know that William Wordsworth read her sonnets; one might even venture to say he studied them.

Based upon the research of Bishop Hunt, who examined a copy of the 1789 fifth edition of Elegiac Sonnets owned by Wordsworth and now housed in the Dove Cottage Library in Grasmere, it seems that Wordsworth, the poet who is often credited with the revival of the sonnet form in the nineteenth century (after its supposed 100-year hiatus in the eighteenth), was inspired by Smith's sonnets, not just Milton's. Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals provide us with the following glimpse of Wordsworth at work on his sonnet form. The entry is dated Christmas Eve, 1802:

William is now sitting by me, at [half] past 10 o'clock. I have been beside him ever since tea running the heel of a stocking, repeating some of his sonnets to him, listening to his own repeating, reading some of Milton's, and the Allegro and Penseroso. [My beloved William is turning over the leaves of Charlotte Smith's sonnets.

Bishop Hunt reads the same journal entry, notes similarities in content and style between some of the Elegiac Sonnets and some of Wordsworth's, and posits:

Wordsworth is sometimes thought to have begun writing sonnets on his own because he happened to read Milton's one day in 1802. Clearly such a view is an oversimplification. Milton's sonnets of course were important to Wordsworth, but he

owes a considerable debt to the minor sonneteers, especially Charlotte Smith, who wrote in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century. (87)

Hunt's choice of adjective to describe Smith's status as a "sonneteer" need not detain us long, for he clearly wants to leave no doubt as to his judgment concerning the literary merit of Smith's poetry as opposed to Wordsworth's.

To bring us back to the sixth indictment/dismissal in Russ's catalog, let us notice that Smith's poetry is significant to Hunt "for one, limited reason." As he says, "one wishes to understand why a great poet [Wordsworth] becomes interested in a very minor one [Smith]" (90). Fittingly, it is Smith's text itself which bears witness to Wordsworth's "interest":

The book [the fifth edition of Elegiac Sonnets] contains a few marks and annotations by Wordsworth, his autograph signature in several places, and a dated inscription in his hand, "St. John's Cambridge '89." Two later sonnets by Charlotte Smith, copied out in Wordsworth's clearest early hand, are preserved on the rear fly-leaf. (Hunt 85)

Even more intriguing information is embedded in a footnote to Hunt's article in which the scholar mentions one sonnet (#44, to be discussed later) in which Wordsworth has made several emendations--in punctuation, diction, and syntax

(101). This is striking in that it shows us Wordsworth using Smith's poetry as a virtual workbook of sorts to hone his own craft.

Such information led me to wonder what, if anything, Wordsworth ever said about Smith and her sonnets. In The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth, Markham L. Peacock, Jr. records that Wordsworth once claimed to have "adopted" "[t]he form of the stanza . . . and something in the style of versification" of his "Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees' Head" (written in 1833, and certainly not one of Wordsworth's most popular or highly regarded poems) from Smith's "St. Monica" (not one of the Elegiac Sonnets and not one of Smith's most popular or highly regarded poems). Wordsworth proceeds to identify Smith as "a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered" (351). One cannot help but remember the familiar figure of the Prophet/Priest of Romantic discourse and suspect that, at least in this case, Wordsworth did indeed foresee the future.

But Wordsworth was correct in his acknowledgment of Smith's role as literary forebear. In true Romantic form, Charlotte Smith was a pioneer. As Susan Hastings points out in An Encyclopedia of British Women Writers:

Elegiac Sonnets was a novelty for an audience unaccustomed to Romantic poetry and to a form that had been, with a few random exceptions, out of

style for nearly a century, and it was only after S.'s [sic] death [in 1806] that the market for the book began to dwindle. By that time Coleridge and Wordsworth's "experimental" Lyrical Ballads had been published. . . . (418)

In her use of the sonnet form, Smith appropriates a genre traditionally claimed by males. From Petrarch to Donne, the sonnet lent itself primarily to the expression of male passion and desire. But in Smith's hands, the sonnet is the vehicle for the expression of female victimization, alienation, and despair. Motherless at the age of three, given in marriage when she was not quite sixteen by her father to a husband whose irresponsibility and profligacy led to years of suffering, subject to the machinations of a legal system which denied her agency (and thus, in effect, denied her selfhood), Smith did, as Jonathan Wordsworth has said, have "a good deal to be elegiac about" (1).

Along with the sonnets themselves, Smith's prefaces provide invaluable insight into her attempts to express this female victimization, and her attempts at self-defense and self-authorization. In the preface to the first and second editions, Smith presents herself as a reluctant author, one virtually coerced into sharing her sorrow with the world:

Some of my friends, with partial indiscretion, have multiplied the copies they procured of these attempts [early manuscript copies of the sonnets],

till they found their way into the prints of the day in a mutilated state; which, concurring with other circumstances, determined me to put them into their present form. (Smith 3)

Smith's mention of mutilation as provocation for self-expression, particularly for insistent self-expression, is especially provocative. Mutilation as evidence of victimhood and as incentive to speak/write (and "sing," as we shall see when we turn to the nightingale sonnets later in this chapter) plays a central role in Smith's construction of herself as author. Smith presents herself to us as one who, due to victimization of one kind or another, feels driven to self-expression. In her preface to the sixth edition (1792), Smith's stance becomes even more self-defensive, but, at the same time, self-assertive. She absolutely insists upon her right to own her suffering, and to express it, and she staunchly maintains this right, even in the face of criticism from a well-meaning "friend" who advises:

I am far from supposing that your compositions can be neglected or disapproved, on whatever subject: but perhaps "toujours Rossignols, toujours des chansons tristes" ["always nightingales, always sad songs"], may not be so well received as if you attempted, what you would certainly execute as successfully, a more cheerful style of

composition. (qtd. in Smith 5)

Smith responds:

"Alas! . . . "Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?" Or can the effect cease, while the cause remains? You know that when in the Beech Woods of Hampshire, I first struck the chords of the melancholy lyre, its notes were never intended for the public ear! It was unaffected sorrows drew them forth; I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy--And I have unfortunately no reason yet, though nine years have since elapsed, to change my tone. (5; Smith's emphasis)

She continues her self-vindication by mentioning the Chancery suit which she hoped would lead to the recovery of money left in trust to her children by her father-in-law and the fact that nine years have passed since "the Honourable Men" had promised that "all should be well, all should be settled" (5). Charlotte Smith's father-in-law was Richard Smith, a director of the East India Company. When he died in 1776, he left a complicated will (complicated due to its attempts to protect the estate from his son's dissipations), but unfortunately it had been written without benefit of legal counsel (Curran xxi). In his 1993 introduction to Smith's poems, Stuart Curran encapsulates Smith's powerless position in the face of a legal system which seemed to be

"an arbitrary machine of power operating without any essential relation to equity" (xxi). Despite the fact that she had married into a powerful family, Charlotte Smith literally had no voice, no self, under the law. Because of her gender, she could not be a litigant in a suit which so directly affected her and her children.

The estate was thus plunged into a litigation of Dickensian intricacy whose principal issues took twenty-three years to sort out, and both Benjamin and Charlotte were long dead before the final settlement actually took place. The bulk of the estate was siphoned off into legal fees, and, incredible as it may seem, the four surviving children of Charlotte Smith who had been the main object of her father-in-law's protective codicils were unable until 1813, thirty-seven years after his death, to claim their shares in his estate.

(Curran xxi)

By the time Smith wrote the preface to the sixth edition, she and her husband (who had fled England once again in 1787 to escape his debts) were legally separated, she was left to provide for eight children on her own, and her husband still had legal claim to her earnings from her writing. But this information is not included in the preface, only her ineffectual struggles with the legal system, struggles which she mentions along with the conversation between her and her

friend by way of "apology for that apparent despondence, which, when it is observed for a long series of years, may look like affectation" (Smith 6).

Smith seems desperate to communicate to her readers the authenticity and legitimacy of her suffering, but is hesitant to divulge the more private reasons for her grief:

I shall be sorry, if on some future occasion, I should feel myself compelled to detail its [her despondency's] causes more at length; for notwithstanding I am thus frequently appearing as an Authoress, . . . I am well aware that for a woman--"The Post of Honor is a Private Station."

(6; Smith's emphasis)

This seems to be the first direct mention by Smith in the prefaces of the role her gender plays in her writing. Tellingly, it is an acknowledgment of imposed silence regarding personal suffering. Smith does not want to be accused of affectation, for contrived emotion (or even the suspicion of such) would be the kiss of death for elegiac poetry, which depends upon the invocation of pathos. So she feels called upon to explain something of her situation in order to prove the validity of her pain. But should she disclose too much in an attempt to lend authenticity to her writing, to further authorize herself as a speaker/writer within the elegiac mode, she risks loss of audience--because for a woman to complain publicly of oppression and

mistreatment is unseemly and because, as Esther Schor has noted, too strong of an appeal to logos (or ethos) would undercut the appeal to pathos upon which Smith's sonnets are based.

In Esther Schor's reading of Elegiac Sonnets, she explores the difficulties inherent in maintaining an authentic intensity and an appeal to pathos throughout multiple revisions and reprintings of sonnets: "The addition of new sonnets over a period of years, all ostensibly alluding to the same source of grief, called for new prefaces which would attest even more adamantly to the constancy and continuity of the poet's grief" (61). And certainly, in the prefaces, Smith's attestations do increase in adamancy; Smith seems to have to work harder and harder to authorize herself as an elegiac poet and the only vehicle at hand for such authorization is her personal suffering (which, as we have already seen, places her in a double bind). Schor comments:

In the course of its increasingly public career, the cumulative sonnet cycle undergoes a shift from the emotional unity of lyric into the dynamic transformations of narrative. A generation after Smith and Bowles, the legacy of their autobiographical narratives would appear anew in the elegiac biographies that form the center of Wordsworth's Excursion. But what these sonnet

cycles narrate, finally, is the difficulty of authorizing their pathetic appeal through ethical and logical strategies. (61)

An increasing awareness of authorial (and personal) constraint and an increasing frustration in response to such constraint become blatantly apparent in Smith's 1797 preface to Volume II.

The vituperative tone of this preface and its more explicit complaints of mistreatment led to its being suppressed upon publication of the second edition of the volume (in 1800). Here, the "honourable men" mentioned ironically five years before are now blatantly termed "aggressors" and "oppressors" (9). After mentioning two obvious causes of extreme grief (the "maiming" of one son in battle, the death of a favorite daughter--for which Smith directly blames the "honourable men" who now no longer even pretend to be interested in pursuing justice for her or her children), Smith seems to pull herself back for a moment from the airing of such private grief to make the following comment: "I am well aware that the present is not a time when the complaints of individuals against private wrong are likely to be listened to. . . ." (8). Upon first reading, one may pause in consternation--in this the age of revolution and the declaration of the rights of the individual, the complaints of individuals against wrong surely have ample audience! But, in 1797, England is at war, and anti-

revolutionary sentiment does indeed exist as many Europeans associate "revolution" with France and Napoleon. The most salient point regarding Smith's comment, however, has to do with the word "private." Smith is absolutely right in this case. Her oppression is "private," and it is legal. For, as a woman in 1797 (even a woman who had married into a powerful family), she is not legally entitled to certain "rights of individuals." Under the law, she is self-less; in her culture, she is voice-less unless she speaks what those empowered by this legal system and by this culture want to hear. Smith is acutely aware of these conditions of selfhood and self-expression. We see evidence of this awareness at least as early as her "Post of Honor" statement of 1792 and again in this preface as she speaks of those "liberal-minded personages" who "can never forgive an author that has, in the story of a Novel, or the composition of a Sonnet, ventured to hint at any opinions different" from theirs (10). This is the moment at which, according to Esther Schor, Smith "come[s] to indict the moral authority of her audience" and thus violates "the decorum of the pathetic appeal" (61).

In Bearing the Dead, Esther Schor asserts that despite Smith's earlier certainty that "her mourning was mediated by a culture that valued sensibility and melancholy" and thus she need only lay claim to a "continuing, private source of pain" to authorize herself as speaker/writer within the

elegiac mode (62), in later editions, Smith comes to feel "a sense of alienation from the texts of her own mourning" (63), an awareness of her "failure to authorize pathos" (65). Schor claims that Smith "reckons her failure as a gendered exclusion from the moral authority of the 'rude forefathers'--from Gray's cult of sympathy for the patriarchal dead" (65).

Certainly Smith's awareness of "gendered exclusion" cannot be doubted; she knew why she could not be admitted as a litigant in a legal case, and she knew, as we have already seen, that "for a woman--'The Post of Honor is a Private Station.'" And, of course, she knew (again, as we have seen from her prefaces) that she might be accused of affectation. However, while Schor asserts that "Smith's sonnet cycle, taken together with its prefaces . . . , narrates an increasingly pessimistic tale of her own rhetorical failure to evoke pathos" (63-64), I read her sonnets and prefaces as a chronicle of her increasing awareness that no matter how often or how well she may express suffering and "evoke pathos," no alleviation of her pain seems forthcoming. And if she wishes to continue as a poet in the elegiac mode, striving for such a respite is inadvisable. After having constructed and authorized herself as speaker/writer through suffering, Smith risks losing her authorial voice (and her audience) altogether as she attempts to name more explicitly the source of the suffering. For such naming is a form of

confrontation, and should she shift from victim to accuser, she may soon find herself excluded from "the cult of sympathy."

As we turn our attention to the sonnets themselves, we may very well ask some crucial questions: What is there in Elegiac Sonnets to earn Charlotte Smith more than a footnote in literary history? What earned her the admiration of her contemporaries, but seemed to have lost her (for most of the last two centuries) the "test of time" battle which, as we have seen, is more strategically complex than its name suggests?

To begin to answer these questions, I would focus first upon Smith as a Romantic, and (again) as a Romantic pioneer at that (if such a title, given Romantic ideology, is not redundant).¹ Not without reason does Stuart Curran in his introduction to the 1993 edition of Elegiac Sonnets call Smith "the first poet in England whom in retrospect we would call Romantic" (xix). Before Curran's claim, Bishop Hunt had noted in Smith's sonnets "an easier arrangement of rhymes in defiance of the stricter Petrarchan form," an emphasis on "the poet's own actions and feelings at a particular and supposedly real moment in his life," and a concern with the relationship between the poet and the

¹In his classic essay, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," Arthur O. Lovejoy captures the essence of one of Romanticism's "ideals"--"ceaseless striving towards goals too vast or too exacting ever to be wholly attained" (19).

natural world (Hunt 89-89). I would add that the very characteristics which are so often identified as "Wordsworthian" or as indicative of High Romanticism (of which Wordsworth is still often viewed as the High Priest/Father) are visible in Smith's poetry. The revolutionary "patterns of thought" and "conventions of style" (Curran xix) which we see in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads appear in the 1784 edition (and successive editions) of Elegiac Sonnets. In the sonnets, we see a privileging of passion over reason, of the natural world over the world of "getting and spending,"² of the struggles of the individual (the disempowered or alienated individual, in particular) over the interests of "society." Furthermore, we often see in Smith's poetry a correlation between the internal landscape of the human heart and mind and the external, natural landscape, a tendency to turn toward nature for solace, and a portrayal of the passage from childhood to adulthood as a loss of radical innocence and joy. Add to these characteristics familiar objects which often appear in Romantic poetry, such as the moon and the nightingale, and one has an idea of the landscape of the sonnets. In Smith's hands, however, these characteristics (which probably bring to mind the poetry of Mellor's "Big Six" of Romanticism) take on different or specialized meanings.

²from the first lines of Wordsworth's sonnet: "The world is too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers. . . ."

While Smith's poetry evokes a Romantic landscape and exhibits Romantic themes, it provides us with a different view of Romanticism than the one suggested when our definition of Romanticism is based primarily upon the works of male Romantics. For Smith's position as a woman in a historical moment and a "literary tradition [which] normatively identifies the figure of the poet as masculine" (Homans, WW&PI 3) influenced both her poetic expression and its reception. This subject position, of a gendered female in a world structured by social codes written by men for men's purposes, not only made her prey to victimization, it also colored her view of childhood and of nature and determined her concept of the power of the self. It made her, to use the terminology of Margaret Homans, "textually conscious of . . . femininity" (WW&PI 3), and this textual consciousness of femininity is obvious through Elegiac Sonnets.

Smith's vision of childhood is one of innocence and joy. But this joy is the result of lack of knowledge more than of specialized knowledge. Childhood is a "happy age," as she tells us in Sonnet 27, only inasmuch as a child is "[b]ly sorrow yet untouched, unhurt by Care" (2). The child is happy because the illusions are as yet unshattered; he is "wise" only inasmuch as he is "inexperienced" (5). Unlike Wordsworth's child in the Intimations of Immortality Ode, Smith's child in Sonnet 58, "The Glow-Worm," is not so much

a "seer blest" as an embodiment of the disappointment and loss which result from a belief that one may hold on to the bright joys of childhood (symbolized here by the "glow-worm"). In this poem, a "happy child" on a Spring night, dazzled by the glow-worm, which he sees as something as magical and transcendent as a star ("Star of the dewy grass," he addresses it), learns that this star is indeed unattainable. For after announcing his intent to possess it ("I make thee mine," he cries) and thinking he has captured his "prize," he awakes in the morning only to find this star "rayless as the dust." This is an even more pointed lesson than the one Wordsworth tells us in "Nutting" that he learned as a boy, that one must touch Nature with a "gentle hand" because "there is a spirit in the woods." Smith's child in "The Glow-Worm," bent on possessing part of Nature, experiences irredeemable loss. And this is not the only one of Smith's sonnets which presents us with a bleak picture of the possibilities of recapturing the joy of childhood or of the ability to gain control over, and/or give significance to, Nature.

When she remembers her childhood in such sonnets as "To the South Downs" (Sonnet 5), she holds out no hope for an imaginative regaining of lost joy:

Ah! hills belov'd!--where once a happy child,

Your beechen shades, "your turf, your flowers among,"

I wove your blue-bells into garlands wild,

And woke your echoes with my artless song.
 Ah! hills belov'd!--your turf, your flowers remain;
 But can they peace to this sad breast restore;
 For one poor moment sooth the sense of pain,
 And teach a breaking heart to throb no more?
 And you, Aruna!--in the vale below,
 As to the sea your limpid waves you bear,
 Can you one kind Lethean cup bestow,
 To drink a long oblivion to my care?
 Ah! no!--when all, e'en Hope's last ray is gone,
 There's no oblivion--but in death alone!

Memory serves to torture, not comfort, Smith, and it cannot help her recuperate her lost visions. In Sonnet 10 she asks, "Ah! why will Mem'ry with officious care/ The long-lost visions of my days renew?/ . . . Ye dear delusions--ye return no more!" (1-2, 8). Even Spring, that most promising season of the possibilities of regeneration, brings reminders of radical loss, as we see in the last two lines of Sonnet 2: "Another May new buds and flowers shall bring,/ Ah! why has happiness no second spring?" (13-14). Smith asserts that if anything could "bring life's first illusions once again," it would be this "season of delight," but Nature, even Nature at the height of her power with the "sounds of harmony" and "balmy air" of Spring, cannot cure her despair.

While this lack of an up-turn, of a reaffirmation or

resolution, at the end of many of her sonnets may set her apart from what many consider the Romantic tradition,³ it shows her affinity to the other women writers of the period. As Stuart Curran points out in "The I Altered," "Contrary to what one might conventionally expect, in poetry at least, the unhappy ending is the norm of the women writers of the Romantic period" (203). While the poet may be unusually sensitive to the beauty of Nature around her, she also may be unusually sensitive to pain. She perceives herself completely vulnerable to outside influence. She feels she cannot affect Nature with some Coleridgean "shaping spirit of Imagination" any more than she can, as a woman, be admitted as a litigant in the protracted legal suit over her father-in-law's estate or have a legal right to her own earnings held by her estranged husband. Smith, as a poet and a woman, sees herself as vulnerable, and her poetic voice illustrates this; it is, as Stuart Curran puts it, "pointedly a woman's voice, prey to victimization" (199).

Smith's concept of the self and the power of that self is intimately linked with her poetry, and an awareness of this link is of vital importance in understanding a crucial distinction between her poetry and that of the High (male)

³Reconciliation, synthesis, rejuvenation are certainly Romantic projects, but not all Romantic poets were equally invested in them (or as likely to embody them in their poetry). Much of Wordsworth's poetry ends in reaffirmation and resolution. But Byron was not uniformly given to happy endings/up-turns (see, for example, Manfred).

Romantics. To return to Mellor's assertion: "These six male poets have been heralded because they endorsed a concept of the self as a power that gains control over and gives significance to nature, a nature troped in their writing as female" (8; my emphasis). While Smith's Nature, like the Nature invoked by the male Romantics, also seems to be "female," her relationship to it is significantly different. Smith's interaction with Nature may, on occasion, bring her comfort; but it does not bring her empowerment or transcendence. In his 1993 introduction to her poems, Stuart Curran, citing her "variety of natural treatments," asserts that her poetry "testifies to an alternate Romanticism that seeks not to transcend or to absorb nature but to contemplate and honor its irreducible alterity" (xxviii). While Smith's sonnets are characterized by an "evocation of natural detail" (Curran 202)--from the catalogues of various wildflowers to the close attention to nuances of light and sound in the natural landscape--and by musings on her own internal state which are almost always linked to the external forces of Nature, she is aware of this "alterity," and the transcendent, empowered self is nowhere in sight.

Evidence of this awareness of alterity and lack of transcendence can be seen, for example, in Sonnet 39 ("To Night"). Smith begins by proclaiming her love for the "mournful, sober-suited Night," but the pathetic fallacy

does not continue unchallenged throughout the poem.

Although she complains of her depression and grief, she does so to the "deaf cold elements." Smith chooses to tell her tale of woe to the natural elements, but she harbors no hope of receiving direct aid from a Wordsworthian Mother or Nurse: "Tho no repose on thy dark breast I find,/ I still enjoy thee" (9-10). Her "communion" with Nature leaves her "hopeless, yet resigned," and she looks to Heaven, not earth, for recognition and pity.

Further evidence of this "alternate Romanticism" can be seen in Sonnet 44 ("Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex," the sonnet Wordsworth "corrected" in his 1789 edition of Elegiac Sonnets), Sonnet 4 ("To the Moon"), and Sonnets 3, 7, and 55 ("To A Nightingale," "On the Departure of the Nightingale," "The Return of the Nightingale. Written in May 1791").

The moon, of course, was a favorite symbol of the Romantics. They saw it, like the poetic imagination and the individual mind, as both reflector and source of light, a light which transfigures as well as illuminates. The moon seems to call forth the dream-like, the irrational (one thinks of Wordsworth watching the moon drop down behind Lucy's cottage and his premonition that Lucy might be dead). In Sonnet 44, the moon is a "mute arbitress," seemingly indifferent to the destruction for which it is at least indirectly responsible:

Press'd by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
 While the loud equinox its power combines,
 The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
 But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides. (1-4)

The result of the sea's "ride" over the land is that a small, sea-side village gives up its dead. A wall which once enclosed a churchyard is broken down and human remains are washed out to sea or left scattered on the beach. Nature is not hospitable here, but Smith's point is not to rail against Nature's insensitivity to humanity. The scattered bones of the dead do not make her feel grief or outrage; they make her feel envy:

But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
 They hear the warring elements no more:
 While I am doom'd--by life's long storm oppress,
 To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest. (11-14)

Their bones may be scattered, but the dead do not feel dishonor or pain, and this absence of suffering is what Smith envies.

In Sonnet 4, Smith directly addresses the moon as a female deity: "Queen of the silver bow!" This Queen is Artemis, the chaste huntress and inhabitant of secret groves, and her "mild and placid light" calms the speaker's "troubled breast." Smith also thinks of death as she gazes at the moon, but she, unlike Wordsworth in "Strange Fits of Passion," does not start in fear. She welcomes the idea of

release. In Greek mythology, women who died a quick and painless death were said to have been slain by Artemis' silver arrows, arrows which find their correlatives in the silver beams of moonlight. And it is not a Christian heaven which Smith longs for here, but a soft, "serene" rest in the "benignant sphere" of this female deity. It almost seems as if, for Smith, death signifies some regaining of her original chastity--the wholeness experienced before the disaster of her marriage and the struggles of motherhood, before despair--a reintegration of the self as well as a reintegration with nature.

However, just as the moon is a "mute arbitress" (in Sonnet 44), indifferent to the destruction she may cause, in Sonnet 59 Smith once again casts the moon as something removed from and unconcerned with the struggles of humanity. The first four lines describe the "awful pageants" of a breaking storm. And presiding over all the tumult is the moon "in serenest azure": "beaming high," "proud," and "[u]nvex'd." As Esther Schor observes, this depiction of the moon casts it as "imperious and inclement, hoarding the blessings of peace" (64)--hardly a depiction of nature which welcomes or incites desire for "reintegration" within the heart of one seeking peace and rest. While in Sonnet 4 the moon may shed "mild and placid light" and even disperse calm and hope with its rays, by the time Smith writes Sonnet 59 in 1791, she seems less hopeful of receiving either peace

or sympathy from the outside world. As Schor observes: "In Smith's sonnets, virtually each correspondent breeze, storm, or nightingale is echoed in a later palinode in which the addressed figure fails to sympathize with the poet" (64).

Alluded to in her first sonnet and addressed directly in her third, seventh, and fifty-fifth, the nightingale, which was to become another favorite symbol of the Romantics, serves as a powerful symbol of the female poet. One thinks of Philomela, of the violation of the female body and the silencing (or appropriation) of the female tongue. One thinks of the metaphoric emasculation, the literal (both in the sense of "according with the letter of the law" and "actual") immasculation of women.⁴

In the first of the nightingale poems, Sonnet 3, we see that Smith identifies with the bird. Like the "songstress sad," Smith wishes she could "sigh, and sing at liberty." It is interesting to note here that in Coleridge's 1798 conversation poem, "The Nightingale," the bird is presented as male, even though Coleridge mentions "Philomela's pity-pleading strains" just a few lines earlier. While Coleridge's portrayal may be more exact (it is said to be the male who sings so heartily at night to attract a mate),

⁴Immasculation: a term used by Judith Fetterley to describe the alienation from or erasure of self which results from a gendered paradigm of reality whereby women are taught to see the male point of view as universal truth and to accept as legitimate a system of values which includes their oppression/exclusion.

Smith's is more provocative in terms of what her invocation of the nightingale illustrates about her sense of self and of poetry.

Not surprisingly, Smith, unlike Coleridge, has no argument with Milton; for her, the nightingale is a "most musical, most melancholy bird,"²⁵ as she says in the first two lines: "Poor melancholy bird--that all night long/
Tell'st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe." In the second stanza, Smith signals her desire and intent to "translate" the nightingale's song, a song which Smith imagines being sung to the "listening" night, not the "deaf cold elements" which confront her in Sonnet 39. Smith proceeds to hypothesize about the source of the nightingale's sorrow; tellingly, the poet wonders if the poor bird was once human and suffered "from friends some cruel wrong" (those "friends" upon whom Smith relied to plead her case in Chancery Court?) or died a "martyr of disastrous love" (was marital "love" not disastrous for Charlotte Smith?). Like Philomela, Smith can "sing"; she can even find an audience for her mournful songs/sonnets. But, as we have already seen in discussing her prefaces, Smith cannot, or feels she cannot, speak of her personal victimization directly. If she does, she must be prepared to interrupt her song, her

²⁵Arguing, as I do, that Smith's poems "express a female point of view," Stella Brooks (discussing Sonnet 3) says: "A woman poet cannot celebrate the rape and mutilation of Philomel; she can only mourn with her" (17).

only means of self-expression; for the conventions of elegiac poetry demand a kind of suffering and an expression of grief which would be recognized as legitimate.⁶ Or she must be prepared to be silenced (we may recall that her more biting preface--the 1797 preface to Volume II--was suppressed in the subsequent printing of the volume). The pathos of Sonnet 3 rests in the fact that Smith cannot, despite her similarities to the nightingale, "sigh, and sing at liberty."

The remaining two nightingale sonnets signal important developments in Smith's use of the nightingale as symbol of female suffering and poetic possibility. In "On the Departure of the Nightingale" (Sonnet 7), the sonnet that at least two scholars, pointing to parallels in mood, theme, and diction, have offered as influential inspiration for Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale,"⁷ we see Smith bidding "a long adieu" to this "Sweet poet of the woods." But by the time the nightingale reappears in the title of a sonnet in 1791 (Sonnet 55), Smith asserts that evils have "shut [her] languid sense" to the nightingale's song--perhaps signaling the immasculation and self-alienation discussed earlier, as well as the traditionally Romantic complaint of loss of

⁶Schor asks, provocatively, "[W]hat place was there in an elegiac sonnet for a wastrel husband in debtor's prison, assiduously maintaining a relentless and legal claim on one's earnings?" (62).

⁷See Pollin and Whiting.

poetic inspiration.

To return to Coleridge's refutation of the Miltonic sentiment (that the nightingale is a "melancholy bird"), it is important to note that Coleridge must steadfastly refute this concept in order to maintain his belief in an imaginatively creative and powerful self. But Smith, who openly informs her reader in the preface to the sixth edition of Elegiac Sonnets (1792), "I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy," embraces the melancholy nightingale as a vehicle for her own suffering, insists upon its validity, insists upon her right to utter it--even if only partially, and through poetry. Like the reformer who came after her, the advantageously-named Florence Nightingale, Smith seems to implore, "Give us back our suffering, we cry to Heaven. . . . Better have pain than paralysis."

Working within a poetic form which was traditionally a vehicle for the expression of masculine sorrow, loss, and alienation, Smith even made use of what Curran calls "a number of ventriloquized voices"--most notably Petrarch's and Goethe's. It may appear ironic that a poet who, as I have been arguing, was in search of a means of female self-expression and self-authorization would choose male personae. However, her use of "ventriloquized voices" such as those of Petrarch and Goethe signals a further attempt to find an appropriate medium and a familiar context through which to express her suffering. In the sonnets "From

Petrarch" (13-16) and those "Supposed to be written by Werter" (21-25), Smith writes of despair and longing and even entertains thoughts of suicide, all safely in the guise of tormented male lovers for whose passionate outbursts her audience, familiar with the mournful Petrarch and the tormented "Werter," is already prepared. Schor reads this move on Smith's part as evidence of "the highly mediated quality of her elegiac laments," perhaps even an early sign of "a sense of alienation from the texts of her own mourning" in later editions of Elegiac Sonnets (63). And perhaps such "alienation" does occur when Smith dons a male persona, but it also occurs every time she puts pen to paper. For the distance between the lived suffering and the expression of that suffering is not easy to bridge, especially for a female poet working within the confines of cultural expectations and conventions of poetic expression.

Despite the fact that, as Jonathan Wordsworth says, "she had a good deal to be elegiac about" (1), some feminist scholars, like many present-day readers, seem irritated by the complaint motif of Smith's work, calling her sonnets "lugubrious" and "grumbling and melancholic" (Todd, Angelica 222, 237). And as Susan Hastings points out, "Almost from the beginning Smith's novels have been criticized for their sentimentality and self-indulgent complaining," a judgment often passed on her poetry as well (418). It would seem that many readers and critics have seen fit to valorize a

certain type of "complaining" while anathematizing another.

Complaining of aesthetic, philosophic want is perfectly acceptable; a Romantic poet may (must?) bemoan the loss of the "visionary gleam" which provides the foundation for a self both powerful and creative, but never, never must he (or, perhaps more to the point, she) cry out against personal, material want and injustice. For doing so transgresses an unwritten cultural rule. As Schor points out:

In the early editions of Elegiac Sonnets, Smith frames her authorizing claim to a continuing, private source of pain within a variety of allusions to literary precursors. Like Hume and Gray, Smith understood our affections to be a dialogue between personal experience and the "intercourse of sentiments" that occurs in culture. (62)

However, "[f]ive years after the publication of Smith's Elegiac Sonnets, her name has become synonymous with 'elegance,' a code word for affectation; here Smith's acknowledgment that her grief is mediated by culture is turned against her" (66). Again the "double bind" appears: Smith signals her understanding of the code of behavior which specifies that she avoid personal, detailed descriptions of the source of her grief (as we see in the prefaces from 1784 to 1792) and she leaves herself open to

charges of "affectation" and inauthenticity, characteristics which will discredit and de-authorize her as a poet in the elegiac mode; she speaks out more openly about the extent of her victimization and she is silenced, or termed "grumbling and melancholic," and again de-authorized.

In true Romantic/prophetic style, Smith seems to have foreseen (and even experienced in her lifetime) the nature of such criticism of the complaint motif running through many of the sonnets. Sonnet 73, "To a Querulous Acquaintance," begins with these lines:

Thou! whom Prosperity has always led
O'er level paths, with moss and flow'rets strewn:
For whom she still prepares a downy bed
With roses scatter'd, and to thorns unknown,
Wilt thou yet murmur at a mis-placed leaf?

While, in a footnote, Smith identifies the "mis-placed leaf" of line five as the rose-leaf which disturbed the rest of a "fastidious being" who lay on a bed of roses, the "leaf" could just as easily be a page--a page of poetry. Smith asks for understanding, or at least for tolerance. Yet this, too, is a dangerous plea, a dangerous rhetorical stance, because it exposes her to charges of "private disability, weakness" as an artist (Kaplan 175).

Near the end of Cora Kaplan's insightful article "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class, and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism," Kaplan explores the source of

Virginia Woolf's discomfort with Jane's soliloquy about the "millions . . . in silent revolt against their lot" in Bronte's Jane Eyre. Kaplan quotes Woolf:

In Middlemarch and in Jane Eyre we are conscious not merely of the writer's character, as we are conscious of the character of Charles Dickens, but we are conscious of a woman's presence--of someone resenting the treatment of her sex and pleading for its rights. This brings into women's writing an element which is entirely absent from a man's, unless, indeed, he happens to be a working man, a Negro, or one who for some other reason is conscious of disability. It introduces a distortion and is frequently the cause of weakness. The desire to plead some personal cause or to make a character the mouthpiece of personal discontent or grievance always has a distressing effect. . . . (174)

Kaplan's immediate response to the above quotation is:

"Note how the plea for a sex, a class, a race becomes reduced to individual, personal grievance, how subordinate position in a group becomes immediately pathologized as private disability, weakness" (174). And certainly this "pathologizing" of a plea for fair treatment or for justice or simply for understanding seems to be at the center of much of the dismissal of Smith's "self-indulgent

complaining." Furthermore, it is my argument that Smith is often still dismissed because, to use Woolf's words, in Elegiac Sonnets we are made "conscious of a woman's presence."

For no matter what persona she may assume--a nightingale, Petrarch, Goethe--Smith presents us in Elegiac Sonnets with a female self which sees itself as vulnerable, violated, non-transcendent. And thus we return to the "test of time" criterion with which we began. Although Smith's poetry exhibits all the Romantic characteristics discussed earlier (from the privileging of passion over reason to the tendency to establish a correlation between the natural world and the individual mind), this one crucial difference--in the self which is presented to the reader--is at the heart of much of the resistance to Smith as a Romantic and/or as a Romantic writer of any real note. Smith's self is highly gendered; it is the stereotypical complaining female victim persona which so chafes the sensibilities of many who wish to deny or to downplay the existence of the very injustice or oppression by which a woman may be victimized.

Exploiting her suffering, Smith constructs and authorizes herself as speaking/writing subject within a literary tradition which, as Margaret Homans observes, "normatively identifies the figure of the poet as masculine" (WW&PI 3). However, as we have seen, her method of self-

authorization and self-construction as an artist only seems to ensconce her further in her role as victim.

CHAPTER 2

Self-Making and Monster-Building in
Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

The novel Mary Shelley once referred to as her "hideous progeny" speaks volumes about the struggle to construct and express a self within a culture which presupposes one's inferiority, even one's non-subjectivity. As many scholars have pointed out,¹ the woman writer may have much in common with Frankenstein's Creature. Frequently denied equality and even subjectivity, both are liable to be labeled as monsters should they attempt to step out of the margins and speak of and for themselves. In Frankenstein, both Mary Shelley and the nameless Creature struggle through language to construct and express selves which are radically at odds with preconceived notions regarding who and what they naturally (essentially) are.

All forms of selfhood (or self-making) are not equally desirable, however. Both Mary Shelley and the Creature implicitly critique one model of Romantic selfhood. Seen by some (such as Percy Shelley) as truly heroic in his defiance of tyrannical power and his steadfast refusal of submission to that power, Prometheus is invoked in the very title of

¹See, for example, Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic, Poovey's The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, and Ross' The Contours of Masculine Desire on the equation of female self-assertion through authorship with monstrosity. All three focus on women writers and texts of the time period within which Mary Shelley wrote and published Frankenstein.

the text. But Mary Shelley presents Victor, "the modern Prometheus," in a none-too-flattering light: self-absorbed, self-exiled, and intent upon self-glorification, he is anything but heroic. Self-making may be the epitome of the Romantic emphasis on the creative potential of the human mind, but it is also incredibly dangerous. This is the caution embedded in Frankenstein, a text which, ironically, is all about self-making. With its multi-voiced narration, its commentary on the role of education and familial exclusivity in the formation of selfhood and of monstrosity, and its cautionary critique of Prometheanism, Frankenstein dramatizes its author's struggle to construct and express herself, and her trepidation about doing so.

In her introduction to the 1831 Standard Novels edition, Mary Shelley begins her vindication (for such it is; she attempts to explain and justify herself as a female author) by attempting to answer what she claims is a "very frequently asked" question: "How I, then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea?" (Shelley 192). One may also remember Thomas Lovell Beddoes' exclamation: "She has no business being a woman by her book!" Although still a teenager when she wrote Frankenstein, Mary Shelley would have been well aware of the consequences for a woman writer whose work seemed to question or assault the established order of society, a sphere in which she, in common parlance, literally had no

"business." She knew that her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had been labeled monstrous and considered unwomanly for holding and speaking "revolutionary" opinions.² So Mary Shelley's anonymous first publication of her novel (in 1818) was ultimately an act of self-defense. Like the Creature, Mary Shelley the author was vulnerable in a culture with a penchant for throwing stones. As it was, many of the novel's earliest reviewers "sharply criticized the anonymous novelist's failure to moralize about the novel's startling, even blasphemous, subject," suspecting that the novel was written by some (male) "follower of Godwin" or even Percy Shelley himself (Poovey, Proper Lady 122). But perhaps more daunting than the specter of a restrictive and possibly vindictive reading audience for the young author was her continual awareness of a father, a lover-then-husband, and the ghost of a dead mother--all of whom seemed to haunt her with the same question which she says plagued her during the summer of 1816 when she began Frankenstein: "Have you thought of a story?"

For the young Mary Godwin, reared with the expectation that she would distinguish herself as an author, the burden of self-expression was heavy indeed. Conscious of the expectations of her father and her lover that she prove to be an author of distinction, haunted by the image of a

²Refer, for example, to Richard Polwhele's 1798 poem The Unsex'd Females.

mother courageous and unrelenting in her own self-expression, Mary Godwin (not yet Mary Shelley) began the composition of her most famous novel, Frankenstein, at the tender age of eighteen. In an 1838 journal entry, Mary Shelley explains her "horror of pushing," her "inability to put [her]self forward unless led, cherished and supported." Virtually pleading with any who might judge her harshly for not speaking out as vehemently as she might be expected to (as the daughter of two of England's most well-known radical thinkers), she insists, "I cannot do that; it is against my nature" (qtd. in Poovey 114). Yet, as Poovey points out, literary production was an integral part of Mary Shelley's journey toward selfhood (115).³

While in Elegiac Sonnets Charlotte Smith appropriates the sonnet form and the elegiac mode to construct and express a female Romantic self, in Frankenstein Mary Shelley chooses an epistolary novel laced with gothicism as her medium. Her novel is a multi-layered narrative, a quite fitting medium for an author who, speaking of her creative impulses from her earliest years to the present (1831), claims, "I was not confined to my own identity" (Shelley 193). We hear "the story" from more than one perspective, and what these multiple perspectives lead us to suspect is

³Poovey observes that "both in her numerous comments about her profession and by her ongoing literary activity, Mary Shelley demonstrated that imaginative self-expression was for her an important vehicle for proving her worth and, in that sense, for defining herself."

that there is not one story at all. There is Walton's story, Victor's story, the Creature's story, and embedded in these narratives are other narratives; we learn of the angelic Caroline Beaufort, the sorely tried and finally harshly sentenced Justine Moritz, the semi-divine DeLaceys, the courageous Safie. Mary Poovey posits:

In addition to the aesthetic purpose it serves, the narrative strategy of Frankenstein also provides . . . a network of relationships. Because of its three-part narrative arrangement, Shelley's readers are drawn into a relationship with even the most monstrous part of the young author; Shelley is able to create her artistic persona through a series of relationships rather than a single act of self-assertion; and she is freed from having to take a single, definitive position on her unladylike subject. In other words, the narrative strategy of Frankenstein, like the symbolic presentation of the monster, enables Shelley to express and efface herself at the same time. . . . (131)

This simultaneous self-expression and self-effacement which Poovey describes is at the heart of Shelley's construction and presentation of herself as author; it allows her to adjudicate between two often contradictory desires: to express a self and to maintain the integrity of that self.

Shelley manages to express a self and to maintain that self's integrity by establishing a type of split consciousness. In The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, Poovey asserts that Mary Shelley negotiated "the collision between what we now call the 'Romantic' model of originality and the 'Victorian' model of feminine domesticity" (116), the collision between authorial, public self and private self, by "splitting . . . herself into two personae" (138). Poovey outlines the ways in which Shelley simultaneously authorizes herself as writer and positions herself as "proper lady": by repeatedly emphasizing that she has undertaken a literary career at the behest of others; by claiming that the original idea for the horrific story came to her unbidden, in a dream; by insisting that if she speaks of herself publicly, she speaks primarily of those events which have to do with her public, authorial persona. This "splitting" of the self that Poovey is describing is intriguing, for we will encounter it again. In the next chapter, I will discuss the ways in which Bronte's Lucy Snowe attempts to disown her own imagination and desire, and her motivations are no doubt quite similar to Mary Shelley's. As a woman seeking autonomy but not wanting to appear "unwomanly" and fearing the potential loss of self (or self-control) which imagination and desire can bring, Lucy will go to great lengths (just as Mary Shelley does) to distance herself from those qualities which have been

presented to her as improper (for a woman) and which she considers threatening to her developing self. It is also noteworthy that the second strategy by which Shelley attempts to distance her private self from her public, authorial self--insisting upon the dream-birth of artistic vision--partakes of familiar Romantic paradigms of inspiration-as-visitation.⁴ As passive recipient/medium of inspiration, Shelley is both protecting herself against charges of unwomanly self-assertion and embodying Keats' concept of the "poetical Character" (as opposed to the "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime"): "it is not itself--it has no self."⁵

The split between Shelley's public self (as author) and her private self (as woman) is made even more evident in the following excerpt from the 1831 introduction:

It is true that I am very averse to bringing myself forward in print; but as my account will only appear as an appendage to a former production, and as it will be confined to such topics as have connexion with my authorship alone, I can scarcely accuse myself of a personal intrusion. (Shelley 192; my emphasis)

⁴Recall, for example, Blake's visions and his conversations with Old Testament prophets and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" ("Or, A Vision in a Dream").

⁵from Keats' letter to Richard Woodhouse, Oct. 27, 1818.

Her choice of words is revealing of just what was (and still is in 1831) at stake for her in the publication of this novel; she is bringing herself forward in print. Thus, Poovey's earlier claim that Frankenstein is essentially a novel about "identity-formation" becomes even more meaningful (122). For what we come to see is that Frankenstein was not just about the formation of Victor's identity or the formation of the Creature's so-called monstrosity; it was about the authorial and personal construction of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley:

Essentially, Shelley took advantage of both the artificiality and the paradoxes of the Proper Lady. Once she accepted the paradox--and, by extension, the fiction--inherent in the conventional definition of femininity, she was able to revise the unacceptable facets of herself and her past so that "Mary Shelley" would seem to be only what a lady should be. (Poovey 144)

The formation and then revision of self--there are few tasks more Romantic by their very nature.

While most of the evidence Poovey uses to support her claim for Mary Shelley's "splitting" of herself into two personae comes from the 1831 introduction and later journal entries, my main interest lies in that first anonymous text by a young woman author. What besides youthful uncertainty and self-proclaimed natural shyness might provoke her to

publish her first novel anonymously, when publication was exactly what most people around her so eagerly expected and encouraged?

Just as the Creature approached the DeLacey cottage with hope but also fear in his heart, just as he approached Victor on the mountaintop (by this point already expecting rejection but still hoping that he might win an audience with his creator), Mary Shelley must have approached the publication of her first novel. In a move reminiscent of the point at which the Creature places his hands before his creator's face in the hope that by relieving Victor of the sight of a form he abhors he may help his maker to listen to the story he has to tell, Mary Shelley ventures into print, partially shielding herself and concealing her femaleness by publishing anonymously. Still so early in her development as author and woman, perhaps she is at this point more like the Creature's Eve than the Creature himself; still under construction, she is highly vulnerable to outside influence. In "Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, and the Woman Writer's Fate," Stephen Behrendt clearly articulates the threat of loss of autonomy with which the woman writer who is seeking autonomy through writing is faced:

The author constantly runs the risk of being made into a fiction by the reader who formulates or extrapolates the author from the text. The woman author is "read" within a system of culturally

encoded patriarchal authority over which she has virtually no control but within which she is expected to express herself. She is thus deprived at once of subjectivity, creativity, and autonomy. . . . For the text that results from that act contains the self that the reader may reformulate and reconstruct in a living lie that reflects not the author but the reader, who has in the act of reading her, appropriated her and torn her to pieces, much as Victor Frankenstein first assembles and then tears to pieces the Creature's mate. (85)

Behrendt concludes by asserting that one may read in Frankenstein, "as in much of Romantic women's writing, the enigmatic warning that creativity may be hazardous to one's health--indeed to one's entire existence" (87).

This seems an incredibly ironic and tragic bind: Mary Shelley, anxious to prove herself worthy of her literary heritage and in the perilous process of self-construction as author, ventures into print, only to risk the fate of the female Creature, dismemberment and loss of self even before that self is a viable entity in its own right. (Although the Creature refers to himself as an "abortion," is it not his mate who truly deserves that title?) Behrendt notes that "physically destroying the Creature's mate is only an emblem of the real act of devastation implicit in Victor's

actions: the demolition of those who will not retreat to passive, silent existence on the margins of human experience" (79).

Mary Shelley had lived much of her life up to the publication of Frankenstein listening silently from the margins. Like the creature in the hovel outside the DeLaceys' cottage, she watched and listened and learned until, finally, she spoke. And what she spoke about is important; she gave a voice to a creature which many subsequent "readers" have chosen to silence. It is no accident that the majority of the film adaptations of Shelley's text have portrayed the Creature as an inarticulate killing machine. By denying him access to language, we may contain and diffuse his incisive indictment of his creator, and of a culture which still continues to push those with dissenting voices into the margins. Risking possible "demolition," Mary Shelley and her Creature step out of the margins and start to speak.

At the heart of the novel is the Creature's tale of how he came to be the monster which his creator accuses him of being. His tale is one long narrative of disownment, abuse, isolation, and pain, but this victim, not satisfied with mere complaint, strikes back, and talks back, in a way that Smith's mournful persona in Elegiac Sonnets never does. While Smith attempts in her prefaces to vindicate herself from charges of affectation or exaggeration and only manages

in so doing to undercut for many readers the pathetic appeal of her poetic persona, the Creature faces a similar problem. Education has made him quite articulate, and he paints the scenes of his misery with such skill that his creator is drawn into wanting to commiserate with him--until the awareness of the Creature's physical difference overrides Victor's compassion: "I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred" (121). Just as Charlotte Smith's femaleness, her physical difference (a difference perceived of as a deformity within a culture which privileges male subjectivity), affects the way she is heard and perceived, and would affect the way Mary Shelley would be heard and received, the Creature's physical being obscures his voice. Victor stops listening when he starts looking, and this look threatens to silence the Creature. The Creature perseveres, however, in his ironic mission--to explain to his own creator how he came to be who and what he is.

As he tells his creator: "I shall relate events that impressed me with feelings which, from what I was, have made me what I am" (92; my emphasis). He is formed by neglect, abuse, isolation, but these abstract qualities are not all that make him such a creature to be feared. He is an educated monster. And it is this education which makes him

more miserable, and therefore more dangerous.

He gains access to the "science of letters" through stealth, through "overhearing" Felix's instruction of the lovely Safie. He learns of virtue at the same time that he learns of cruelty, and is puzzled to find that mankind seems as predisposed to one as it is to the other:

The book from which Felix instructed Safie was Volney's Ruins of Empires. I should not have understood the purport of this book, had not Felix, in reading it, given very minute explanations. . . . Through this work I obtained a cursory knowledge of history. . . . These wonderful narrations inspired me with strange feelings. Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? (95)

Like the young Mary who was a silent listener first when her father had his profound discussions with the likes of Coleridge, Holcroft, Lamb, and Hazlitt, then with Percy Shelley (Butler x), then again in Switzerland in the fateful summer of 1816 when Shelley and Byron discussed poetry and the nature of the origin of life and "incapacity and timidity always prevented [her] mingling in the nightly conversations" (qtd. in Poovey 121), what the Creature ultimately learns is just how completely marginalized (and Other) he is. In this "system of human society" of which he

learns, he literally can not exist:

While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood.

The words induced me to turn towards myself. I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were, high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these acquisitions; but without either he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profit of the chosen few. And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. . . . When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned? (96)

"A man might be respected. . . ," indeed, but not a woman. "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born

slaves?" (79). The preceding quote from Mary Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman would have been quite familiar to Mary Shelley, for she had read and re-read her mother's works. Like the hapless Creature, Mary Shelley is well aware of her disenfranchisement; she knows quite well that, despite her mother's efforts to reveal the artificiality of "natural" differences between men and women, she as a woman is still seen as "not even of the same nature as man." But, like the Creature, she knows that if she is ever to win the favor of her "protectors" (Godwin, Percy Shelley, a culture which claims confinement equals protection), if she ever hopes to signify to these protectors, she must do so within their language. Even if it means remaining for a time in the margins, like the Creature on the outside looking in, she must find a way to insert herself into the conversations to which, up to this point, she has been only a silent listener.

Like Milton's Eve who reasons that increase of knowledge would "render [her] more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undesirable" to Adam (9.823-24), her lord and master within Milton's patriarchal hierarchy, the Creature eagerly absorbs what knowledge he can, hoping that he may render himself "A thing not undesirable" to the DeLaceys. In Volume 2, the Creature remembers the motivation for his intense efforts to master this "godlike science": "for I easily perceived that, although I eagerly longed to discover

myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make the attempt until I had first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure. . ." (90). The Creature is quite aware of what is at stake: until he can establish some sort of relationship with another or others--and he can do this only if he can "master their language"--he is ultimately in a state of nonbeing.

Like Mary Shelley the woman and the author, the Creature can hope to signify only through his mastery of language. As Peter Brooks points out, "In any specular relationship the Monster will always be the 'filthy mass'; it is only in the symbolic order that he may realize his desire for recognition" (593).⁶ Furthermore, Brooks notes that "the monster needs language in order to compensate for a deficient nature" (595). Interestingly enough, Brooks never questions the Creature's gender; nominally and biologically, this "monster" who enters the Symbolic Order yet ultimately fails to "signify" to his own father is male.

Mary Poovey, on the other hand, uses some of the same vocabulary, but her critical perspective is decidedly different. Most significantly, she uses the word "symbolic"

⁶Brooks is drawing upon the Lacanian theory of the Imaginary and Symbolic Orders. The Imaginary is the pre-linguistic world of no "lack"; the child perceives no separation, no difference between itself and the (m)other. The Symbolic Order is governed by the "Law of the Father"; the acquisition of language is linked with an awareness of "lack," of separation and difference.

in a very different way than Brooks does.

Paradoxically, the monster is the victim of both the symbolic and the literal. And, as such it is doubly like a woman in patriarchal society--forced to be a symbol of (and vehicle for) someone else's desire, yet exposed (and exiled) as the deadly essence of passion itself. (Poovey 128)

For Poovey, as for Gilbert and Gubar, this "monster's" plight signifies and symbolizes the experience of women within a patriarchal society.

The point of intersection yet disjunction between these two scholars' readings of the text is particularly suggestive; in a perfect illustration of post-structural slipperiness of language, we find two scholars who appear to be using some of the same words, but they are not speaking the same language. Poovey, in The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, is interested in the material, societal constraints faced by women writers in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries and in their responses to these constraints. Frankenstein, a novel with a "monster" at the very heart of it, is Mary Shelley's "response." Brooks, in "Godlike Science/ Unhallowed Arts," is interested in the central role of language in this text--who is empowered and who is excluded from signification within the Symbolic Order. Yet when he deals with the question of why the Creature is ultimately excluded, he reads the Creature as

"Enlightenment natural man, or noble savage" and notes:

"The Monster's initiation in language, then, unerringly discovers language to be on the side of culture rather than nature. . ." (594). Despite all this talk of those on "the side of nature" (594) and "a central gap or lack of being" (604) and despite the fact that this text and this "monster" are the literary products of a woman, Brooks does not seem to find gender relevant to his discussion, but I do.

Like Poovey, I read the Creature and his plight as symbolic of women's struggle for self-definition, self-ownership, and self-expression in a culture which prefers talking about, to, or at them to talking with them, or, even more radical an idea, listening to them. Like Brooks, I do find language an "explicit theme of the novel" (591) and the crux of the Creature's dilemma (and tragedy) his inability to truly "signify" to Victor. (No matter how well he speaks his father's language, he cannot compensate for his "deficient nature"; he cannot convince his father to "recognize" him.) But it is the intersection of Symbolic Order and symbolic monster which I find most intriguing. As we consider the role language plays in the Creature's struggle to construct and express a self and, ultimately, to justify his very existence, we should not lose sight of the fact that this is a text written by a woman--a woman who, in a society governed by the concept of the natural inferiority of women, faced the threat of charges of monstrosity.

Focusing upon Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's life and her family history as an "elaborate gothic psychodrama" (223), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar peel back the layers of literary allusion to male narratives to reveal Frankenstein's Creature as a "monstrous Eve," the paradigm of the woman writer. Identifying two options open to women writers (also known as "Milton's daughters" in Gilbert and Gubar's mythology) as "apparently docile submission to male myths" or "secret study aimed toward the achievement of equality," Gilbert and Gubar argue that Mary Shelley chooses the second option in Frankenstein: "to take the male culture myth of Paradise Lost at its full value--on its own terms. . .and rewrite it so as to clarify its meaning" (219-20). In particular, Gilbert and Gubar are interested in Frankenstein as "a fictionalized rendition of the meaning of Paradise Lost to women" (221).⁷ One of the crucial elements of this "meaning of Paradise Lost to women" is the awareness of the synonymy of femaleness and fallenness--the discovery which is always a reenactment of Eve's discovery: "not that she must fall but that, having been created female, she is fallen" (234).

Of course, it is not far from this conceptual framework

⁷Mary Jacobus goes a step further, arguing that Frankenstein is an "implicit critique" of Romantic ideology "for its exclusive emphasis on oedipal politics" and that, read in this light, it "thus becomes the novel that most accurately represents the condition of both men and women under the predominantly oedipal forms of Byronic and Shelleyan Romanticism" ("Is There a Woman" 130).

to the assertion that "Victor Frankenstein's male monster may really be a female in disguise" (Gilbert & Gubar 237). Perceived as monstrous by nature, denied a name, denied a voice (until he gains one through stealth, through "secret study" in the womb-like hovel behind the DeLaceys' cottage), Frankenstein's Creature still attempts to appeal to father figures (M. DeLacey and, of course, Victor, his true "father") for compassion and understanding.^a His first appeal to his creator on the night of his own birth was inarticulate. Having no language but a cry, the Creature could not express himself in his father's tongue on that dreary night in November. But when he comes face to face once more with his creator he does so with the ability to speak, and to speak eloquently, as he has trained himself through reading male master narratives--texts which, as Peter Brooks points out, "cover the public, the private, and the cosmic realms, and three modes of love; they indeed constitute a possible Romantic cyclopedia universalis" (595): Goethe's Sorrows of Werther, Plutarch's Lives, and, of course, Milton's Paradise Lost. Just as Mary Shelley authorizes herself at least partially by her invocation of master (male) narrative--she takes as an epigraph a passage from the Great Master himself--the Creature prepares himself

^aJacobus reads this as the monster's tragedy: "his confinement to the destructive intensities of a one-to-one relationship with his maker, and his exclusion from other relations--whether familial or with a female counterpart" ("Is There a Woman" 130).

to speak to his father by mastering his father's language.

The Creature continues his education after Volney by reading these three texts which he finds in the woods.

Goethe's Sorrows of Werther provides him with a familiar theme as he reads of a character longing to attain that which he can never have:

The gentle and domestic manners it [the novel] described, combined with lofty sentiments and feelings, which had for their object something out of self, accorded well with my experience among my protectors, and with the wants which were ever alive in my own bosom. . . . I did not pretend to enter into the merits of the case, yet I inclined towards the opinions of the hero, whose extinction I wept, without precisely understanding it. (103)

Like Werther, the Creature knows what it is to value and adore "something out of self," but he also tells us that he "inclined towards the opinions of the hero." Perhaps we are to understand by this statement that the Creature, like Werther, will find life without love unlivable. Or perhaps there is something more at stake here. Goethe's Sorrows of Werther is the tale of one man's self-deconstruction.

Young, idealistic, prone to melancholy and self-absorption, Werther gradually loses his sense of control, his sense of creativity (or his belief in creativity), his sense of self: "Enough, the source of all my misery is hidden in myself, as

was formerly the source of all my happiness. . . . I suffer terribly because I have lost what was the one delight of my life--the holy, animating power that helped me to create worlds around me--it has gone!" (Goethe 114).

Although Lotte confronts Werther with the possibility that it may be her very unattainability with which he is so desperately in love, he, of course, rejects the possibility that he might be in love with a creation of his own mind. In his morose self-absorption and his glorification of himself as creator of worlds (or erstwhile creator of worlds), Werther sounds very like Victor Frankenstein (or vice versa), but the Creature would have no way of knowing that when he first reads Werther. All he hears is the voice of longing, and he responds.

He also responds to the tales of heroism and virtue which he reads in Plutarch's Lives, and to the mythic master narrative which torments him with further questions about his nature and his identity, Paradise Lost. The Creature recognizes immediately that though he is the unique creation of his master's hand, he is no beloved Adam. As he says to his creator when they first speak on the mountain top: "Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed" (77). This sense of unjust alienation is strengthened when the Creature reads his literal creation narrative--Victor's journal of the months leading up to the

Creature's "birth." As he reads, he understands more fully what he is, but this increase of knowledge brings only alienation and despair. As Adam arraigns his Creator on charges of irresponsibility in Paradise Lost ("Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/ To mould Me man?" [10.743-44]), so the Creature indicts the absent Victor: "Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust?" (105).

Like Milton's Eve, after having tasted of the forbidden fruit of knowledge, the Creature is irrevocably changed by what he learns, and his efforts at self-construction through language and self-improvement through education lead ultimately to abuse and rejection by the very ones he wished to win--just as Mary Shelley's venture into print, though dedicated to her father, coincided with his virtual disownment of her. Intentions and motivations do not ultimately matter in this symbolic world of language, for Mary Shelley and her Creature are attempting to express "otherness" and to be accepted by their "fathers" within a discourse which denies their very claim to subjectivity. As Poovey explains:

In her [Mary Shelley's] culture, objects and nature and women and the literal, as versions of the Other in opposition to which the Subject seeks definition, are all on the same side of the conceptual axis. . . . As Mary Shelley imagines

her female self, she gives her own conflicted energy the form of a monster, a vivified corpse that is capable of commanding pity but that, in all its actions and despite its intentions, destroys every living being it touches. As she imagines the act of creativity, she imagines exiling her own imaginative energy into a landscape that is fatal to figuration and that freezes all attempt to transform or disguise the self. In such a world, the monster--and, by extension, the female artist--is doomed; in the object world of nature, even one who longs to speak and who acquires eloquence from the tablescraps of patriarchal culture, finds that language loses its power to create more than curiosity or revulsion. (139)

And, indeed, all of the Creature's attempts at self-expression seem to immerse him even further into the role of victim. As Brooks notes: "The godlike science itself proves deceptive: his eloquence can achieve no more than a state of permanently frustrated desire for meaning; his language is metonymic advance without a terminus" (598). Finally, the creature moves from words to actions, playing the role that his creator has already assigned him, murderous monster.

Both the Creature and his creator are driven by the

"desire for meaning." Both are, in many respects, self-educated through their early immersion in texts, but their education consists of the people and experiences they encounter in the world around them as well. Up to now, I have focused on the nature of the Creature's education and its effects on him. But ask many people who Frankenstein is and they will say, without hesitation, that Frankenstein is The Monster. In many ways, Victor does become monstrous, and it is my contention that he, like his creation, is made monstrous, at least partially, through education.

When Victor tells the story of his life to Robert Walton, he begins the history of his education long before his journey to Ingolstadt. For Victor, education began at home, in more ways than one. Commenting upon one of the autobiographical elements of the novel, Marilyn Butler notes that "Frankenstein is a family drama, centred on parental nurture (or the lack of it)" and explores the ways the novel can be read as "the imaginative reworking of experience," Mary Shelley's experience (xiii). Unlike Mary Shelley's mother, Victor's mother does not die as a result of giving birth to him; she lives until he is seventeen and almost ready to embark upon his university education. However, Shelley has Victor inform Robert Walton (and us) that Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein's role in her children's education was limited to the role of spectator: "My father directed our studies, and my mother partook of our

enjoyments" (25). Thus, like Mary Shelley, Victor is educated at home by his father. Mary Poovey mentions that William Godwin "described his typical behavior toward Mary as 'sententious and authoritative' and claimed that he did not know her very well" (118). Alphonse Frankenstein, on the other hand, seems anything but authoritative, but he is ultimately crippling, and one has to wonder how well he knew his children. With his idealist image of domestic bliss clouding his vision, could he have ever imagined what Victor was capable of?

In raising his children, he teaches them to love one another, but he teaches them to love one another exclusively. As Victor muses on his way to Ingolstadt for the first time, his "remarkably secluded and domestic" upbringing has given him an "invincible repugnance to new countenances" and has effectively disabled him socially: "I loved my brothers, Elizabeth, and Clerval; these were 'old familiar faces;' but I believed myself totally unfitted for the company of strangers" (28). Victor's seeming inability to care for any that are not intimately connected with him from childhood is a type of metaphoric incest, a symbol of the extreme self-centeredness which will allow him to create and then disown a creature totally dependent upon him, for, unfortunately, the Creature is not as lovely as the unparalleled Clerval or Elizabeth.

What Alphonse Frankenstein has nurtured in his children

is a narrow domain of affection, an insular sense of the world as a place made for them and their "kind." Marilyn Butler sees this solipsistic, almost incestuous tendency not just in the Frankenstein clan, but in the seemingly angelic DeLacey family as well:

The De Laceys have taught the Creature how to be human, through their involuntary lessons in mutual affection, support, and interdependence. But in civilized life it seems that the family, whether called Frankenstein or De Lacey, feels little or no affinity with the human family at large.

Driven by modern selfish individualism, the De Laceys acknowledge only those strangers who are, like Safie, as beautiful and polished as themselves. (xxxix)

This "modern selfish individualism" translates into irresponsibility and even cruelty, as when Felix beats the supplicating Creature kneeling at M. DeLacey's feet, but it also leads, just as incest does, to the degeneration and destruction of the family itself. We do not know what ultimately becomes of the DeLaceys, but the Frankensteins' fate we know all too well. When tragedy strikes, Alphonse and his children will be powerless before it because they will believe--perhaps innocently, perhaps arrogantly--that their beauty and their virtue will ultimately protect them, and they will be blind to the source of the tragedy because

the source is one of them, perhaps even all of them.

The idea of a supposedly loving family as a breeding ground for monstrosity may seem ridiculous, or possibly horrifying, to some, but if there is one thing that this text shows us it is that (to paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir) one is not born a monster; one becomes one. And where are the foundations of identity and world view laid if not within the confines of family structures and familial interactions? In "Monsters in the Garden," Kate Ellis explores the family in Frankenstein as a "flawed model of socialization" (126), the symbol for a society where polarized gender roles and bourgeois assumptions about class, merit, and virtue set the stage for destruction. In this society, males are constructed to be unfettered aggressors, lone questers in search of glory; females are constructed as passive pawns, and thus perfect victims: "The root of this evil [in the "outside world"] lies in the separation of male and female spheres for purposes of maintaining the purity of the family and the sanctity of the home" (140). As Ellis observes: "Repeatedly throughout the novel Shelley gives us examples of the ways in which the insulated bourgeois family creates and perpetuates divided selves in the name of domestic affection by walling that affection in and keeping 'disunion and dispute' out" (137). Victor's protestations of domestic bliss are belied by a passage which Ellis mentions in her development of the

"divided selves" argument. In this passage, Victor has just begun his journey from Geneva to Ingolstadt and, after contemplating that the "secluded and domestic" life he has led up to this point has given him "invincible repugnance to new countenances," Victor nonetheless remarks: "I had often, when at home, thought it hard to remain during my youth cooped up in one place, and had longed to enter the world, and take my station among other human beings" (28). Ellis surmises that Victor's resentment (over being "cooped up in one place") finds its "objective correlative" in the "Monster" which Victor creates. Cut off from the domestic influences of home, there is nothing to stop suppressed hostility and resentment from reaching its "literally murderous proportions" (137).

Poovey's reading concurs with Ellis' on this point: "left with a craving for knowledge but no reliable guide to direct it, Frankenstein's curiosity is kept within bounds only by the 'mutual affection' of his domestic circle" (123). Outside of this magic circle of mutual affection, Victor is at the mercy of his own egotistical desires. Poovey explains further:

More in keeping with eighteenth-century moralists than with either William Godwin or Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley characterizes innate desire not as neutral or benevolent but as quintessentially egotistical. And, unlike Mary Wollstonecraft, she

does not conceive of imaginative activity as leading through intimations of mortality to new insight or creativity. Instead, she sees imagination as an appetite that can and must be regulated--specifically, by the give-and-take of domestic relationships. If it is aroused but is not controlled by human society, it will project itself into the natural world, becoming voracious in its search for objects to conquer and consume.

(123)

This "Lockean" model of desire activated and directed by external circumstances, but "once aroused," subject to its own "impetus and logic" (123) leads Poovey to identify the Creature as the "product and symbol of [Victor's] self-serving desire" (124). But this model suggests something more as well. In his role as uncontrolled, desiring ego, Victor does literally become the Monster.

In Literary Women, Ellen Moers redefines the Gothic to include any work that gives "visual form to the fear of self" (107). With this definition in mind, we may read the Creature as the embodiment of those parts of himself that Victor loathes and fears--parts that he cannot and will not recognize, for such recognition would lead to the disintegration of the unified sense of self (as Promethean life-giver, martyred god) that he is trying so desperately to defend. On his deathbed, Victor proclaims to Robert

Walton: "During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blameable" (185). Approaching physical disintegration, Victor struggles all the more fiercely to keep his sense of self intact.

Robert Walton may accept Victor's estimation of himself as blameless, but many critics and readers do not. In "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine," Alan Richardson clearly identifies the monster in Shelley's text: "In attempting to bear a child with the aid only of rationality and science, in assuming the extreme pose of a feminized Romantic creator, Shelley's Frankenstein is far more a monster than the pitiable, but fatally unpitied, creature that for us bears his name" (22). In her 1994 introduction to the Oxford edition of the novel, Marilyn Butler also has something to say about the source of monstrosity in the novel: "When it comes to parenting, Frankenstein is himself a monster. He will not acknowledge his only child, the Being he chooses to call Monster, Fiend, and Demon, though no human father ever played so thoroughgoing a role in any birth" (xliv).

But to return to the issue of gender and its role in this text and interpretations of this text, we would do well to return to the point of conception--a young woman writer's conception of a text which explores the nature and nurture of monstrosity. In "Female Gothic," Ellen Moers calls

Frankenstein a "birth myth," a gothic exploration of the intertwining of birth and death told specifically from the perspective of a mother:

Pregnant at sixteen, and almost constantly pregnant throughout the following five years; yet not a secure mother, for she lost most of her babies soon after they were born; and not a lawful mother, for she was not married--not at least when, at the age of eighteen, Mary Godwin began to write Frankenstein. So are monsters born. (79)

Thus, Moers argues for a radically essentialist reading of the text. Frankenstein was born of the "anxieties of a woman who, as daughter, mistress, and mother, was a bearer of death" (86); Mary Shelley's lived, bodily experience as a woman led to the birth of the text she herself called her "hideous progeny," Frankenstein. In this way of looking at the novel, Shelley "transform[s]" the traditional Romantic (male) metaphors of the divided self and/or the self in search of autonomy, the "standard Romantic matter of incest, infanticide, and patricide," into a more female-based narrative--a "phantasmagoria of the nursery" (87). Ellis, however, is quick to add:

Frankenstein is indeed a birth myth, but one in which the parent who "brought death into the world, and all our woe" is not a woman but a man who has pushed the masculine prerogative past the

limits of nature, creating life not through the female body but in a laboratory. (142)

In "Possessing Nature," Anne Mellor also focuses upon this male usurpation of the female "prerogative" when she identifies Victor's creation as a "patriarchal denial of the value of women." To return to Butler's issue of "parental nurture (or the lack of it)," Ellis ends her argument by returning to Victor's father's role in the creation of the "Monster":

Victor's father seems to be the exception that proves the rule [a dominant, but absent, father working outside of the home to support a dependent, subservient wife and children, "all roles circularly functioning to reinforce his dominance"]. He [Victor's father] is an absent father for Victor not because he leaves home every day but because he does not. He is so uninvolved in matters that do not pertain directly to the domestic tranquility that he does not act to guide Victor's interest in science. . . . (142)

And indeed the novel supports this reading.

Victor tells Robert that when he (Victor) was thirteen years old, he happened upon a volume of Cornelius Agrippa. "Apathy" soon turns to what seems to Victor to be enlightenment: "A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind; and, bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my

father" (22). Victor's father's unexplained dismissal of the volume as "sad trash" does more to insure Victor's continued curiosity than to assuage it. Victor wishes to leave no doubt as to the importance of this early lack of parental guidance:

If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed greater powers than the ancient. . . I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside. . . . It is even possible, that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin. (23)

This indictment is buried within what is otherwise, however, a glowing tale of childhood felicity. Indeed, Victor tells Robert that "the voice of command was never heard amongst us," seemingly to impress upon his new friend the idyllic childhood led within the walls of the Frankenstein home. However, one cannot help but wonder if some "voice of command" might not have been exactly what Victor needed. For having never encountered opposition, Victor seemed possessed of the illusion that there could be no opposition to his desires. And thus we come to Victor's Promethean quest.

Like the Greek Titan, Victor wishes to "pour a torrent

of light into our dark world" (36). But Victor's motivation is not selfless goodwill; he does not want merely to be mankind's champion, he hungers to be hailed as such: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (36; my emphasis). Responding to the previous quote, Poovey comments:

Frankenstein's particular vision of immortality and the vanity that it embodies have profound social consequences, both because Frankenstein would deny relationships (and women) any role in the conception of children and because he would reduce all domestic ties to those that center on and feed his selfish desires. (124)

And one should not forget that Prometheus too was a creator, credited in early myths as the force which breathed life into mankind. As Prometheus stole fire from heaven, Victor steals forbidden knowledge and power; the fire he steals is the God-like power of creation. But, as the Creature learns very early on wandering alone in the forest near Ingolstadt, fire burns as easily as it warms and enlightens. Victor, however, seems totally unprepared for any negative outcome to his experiment; he is completely caught up in his quest for fire. In The Contours of Masculine Desire, Marlon Ross reads Frankenstein as a feminist critique of the

destructiveness of masculine desire (the desire to conquer, possess, penetrate) as it is played out in the quest motif. Victor may see himself as a modern Prometheus, but, as we have seen, his motives are not selfless and his theft is more harmful than heroic, for his fire burns more than it illuminates.

When Victor comes face to face with what (he would not say "whom") he has created, he flees, leaving the Creature, and the rest of the world, to fend for itself. This abandonment of the Creature to his own misery and isolation, coming as it does on the heels of Victor's thoughtless creation, casts Victor in a less than heroic light. Mary Shelley's "modern Prometheus" definitely perceives himself as a martyr, but the dead bodies of his loved ones and his own tortured "child" challenge his claim to the title of victim.

Longing to please or at least converse with a "father" who equates physical difference with monstrosity, attempting to tell his story but finding his language ignored or transmuted, the Creature seems doomed. How can one express oneself, tell one's story, if those to whom one tries to tell it see one as something not to be listened to--only looked at, perceived as not-man, and dismissed? How can a non-subject have or tell a story?

The Creature fails to find a truly sympathetic ear for his tale within the confines of the text; his visibility and

his directness provoke only further rejection. But Mary Shelley succeeds in her quest for self-construction and self-expression, and at being heard, through the partial veiling and splitting of self which I discussed earlier. This veiling and splitting would seem to be counter-productive to expression. How can one conceal and reveal at the same time? How can self-division be used in the service of self-expression? The answer of course lies within narrative; one reveals through allusion, metaphor, symbolism. All the while one is safely ensconced within the persona of storyteller, one may express any "monstrous" idea or emotion one wishes; one may even write one's autobiography. As Leigh Gilmore observes in her introduction to Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Presentation: "women's autobiography cannot be recognized as 'autobiography' when it is written against the dominant representations of identity and authority as masculine" (2).

The threat of not being recognized may certainly be read as a liability to a woman writer desirous of self-expression. However, it may also work to her advantage. Mary Shelley may express her sense of marginalization and the grief and rage which accompany it, she may symbolically indict the very Godhead, and she may attribute it all to a "monster." And not just any monster--"it" is made a "he." She places the Creature between herself and her readers,

deflecting from herself the equation of femaleness and monstrosity by making him (and his creator) at least nominally male. Furthermore, the monster, if he is to be the articulate agent of destruction which Shelley creates for us, must be male. For we may listen to a monster, but not a madwoman--a lesson that Bronte's Bertha Mason illustrates all too well.

This association of monsters and madwomen has much to do with the issue of Romantic selfhood, particularly female Romantic selfhood. In "Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic," Karen Stein elaborates on the link between madness, monstrosity, and female selfhood, and her argument merits a long excerpt:

The product of a sensibility that glorifies the self in isolation from society, the Gothic explores the darker side of the Romantic vision. In the Gothic mirror, the self is reflected in the extreme poses of rebel, outcast, obsessive seeker of forbidden knowledge, monster. Monsters are particularly prominent in the work of women writers, because for women the roles of rebel, outcast, seeker of truth, are monstrous in themselves. For a man to rebel, or leave a comfortable home to search for truth are noble acts. Thus, the pattern of behavior is expressed in the heroic epic. For women, however, such

assertions of questing self-hood have been deemed bizarre and crazy; consequently the Gothic mode-- and in particular the concept of self as monster-- is associated with narratives of female experience. (123)

"[R]ebel, outcast, obsessive seeker of forbidden knowledge. . .": here is the Prometheus so admired by Percy Shelley; here is what we have come to call the Byronic Hero. But the next word in the list is important: "monster." Victor is an obsessive seeker of forbidden knowledge; due to his pride and his obsession, he becomes (and creates) an outcast. What Victor rebels against may very well be his own humanity. Victor Frankenstein does not want to be human; he wants to be the much-hailed creator of a master-race. In short, he wants to be a god. Victor's self-making was not finally creative, however; it was destructive. Frankenstein issues a dire warning for those with Promethean aspirations.

Mary Shelley's dark tale of estrangement and alienation is, of the four works discussed in this dissertation, the one most illustrative of what Karen Stein calls the "darker side of the Romantic vision." In this novel, Mary Shelley critiques the potential destructiveness of self-making; the self, cut off from human relationships, intent upon its own Promethean quest, does not just create a monster (as Victor thinks) it becomes one (as Victor does). Gothic in its structure (of stories within stories) and its focus (after

all, the "monster's" story is the heart of the narrative), Frankenstein, ironically, also allows Mary Shelley to do some self-making of her own. For women, the quest for subjectivity may be of necessity a gothic quest, and, as we shall see in Bronte's Villette, the gothic novel may be the truest form of autobiography.

CHAPTER 3

"I, Lucy Snowe":
Romantic Subjectivity in Villette

In Villette, Charlotte Bronte presents us with Lucy Snowe, a woman struggling for survival (both material and psychic), self-possession, and at least the possibility of happiness. What Lucy must struggle against are the restrictions placed upon her by a society in which her gender and her class threaten to render her invisible, even to annihilate her. To complicate matters even more, if she is to achieve any measure of autonomy, she must struggle against her own internalization of those restrictions. Lucy Snowe is doing battle with some aspects of herself while, at the same time, she is attempting to construct and express that self. In my reading of Villette, I will argue that Lucy Snowe is a Romantic subject-in-process; trying desperately to deny her own Romantic impulses, she attempts to disguise and displace them in order to play the role of the proper Victorian heroine. But, as a woman without family, wealth, or influence, she finds herself anything but empowered by this role and is therefore in conflict with it as well. Villette is a narrative of self-authorship and self-authorization; through the writing of her own text, Lucy Snowe both constructs and expresses a form of subjectivity hitherto unavailable to her.

Lucy's world appears to be inimical to her from the beginning; orphaned, destitute, and with no foreseeable

prospects of marriage, Lucy moves about in a world which seems intent upon rendering her invisible and voiceless, because it presupposes her lack of significance. As Brenda Silver points out: "From society's perspective . . . Lucy has no being, and her subsequent presentation of herself as a shadow, as well as other characters' misreading of her nature and her needs, mirrors her social reality" (93-94). That Lucy resists such denial/erasure of selfhood is made evident by her quest. She journeys to a foreign land in search of the means by which she may sustain herself and, in the process, make herself seen and heard, resisting the fate of Frankenstein's Creature who is finally, despite all of his efforts at self-constructions and expression, "lost in darkness and distance." But while the threat of invisibility and silence originates in the outside-of-Lucy--in the social, political, religious forces which empower certain subjects and de-value or even deny others--there is also a darkness at work within Lucy as well. The inside-of-Lucy is the site of internalized assumptions about class, gender, and the power of the self,¹ as well as a strong Romantic impulse toward autonomy, self-actualization,

¹I am indebted to Eugenia DeLamotte's discussion of Villette as a text which illustrates the "interdependence of psychological and economic freedom" (285) and as a "drama of confinement and release in the context of the limited possibilities for transcendence available in [Bronte's] society" (287). Judith Lowder Newton and Terry Eagleton have also contributed much to my understanding of the text through their analyses of the effects of material--class and gender--concerns upon Lucy Snowe and Charlotte Bronte.

passionate engagement with life.

Lucy is, in many ways, a "divided self"²--not only because of the schism between Lucy-the-narrator and Lucy-the-character created by the autobiographical narrative mode, but also because of the fundamental schism(s) within her psyche formed by her own conflicted response to the societal forces which seek to define her. She often attempts to do battle against externally imposed definitions of self, ideas about what is "natural" to/for her as a woman, and to play the roles she is required to play at the same time. As DeLamotte points out, "Lucy Snowe suffers from a radical disjunction between her own experience of herself and the world's assumptions as to what inner states are possible for a woman like her" (245). Much post-structuralist theory is devoted to the issue of the subject--how and by what it is formed, to what extent it is unified or multiple (even contradictory). Feminist critics are especially aware of the importance of this discussion to women's subjectivity. As Catherine Belsey observes: "One of the central issues for feminism is the cultural construction of subjectivity" (593). From Freud and Lacan to Irigaray and Kristeva, arguments over the multiply-

²The term is Masao Miyoshi's and much of my understanding of the "legacy of heartbreak" (regarding the nature and the power of the self) left the Victorians by the Romantics, as well as the role which conflict between passion and reason plays in Victorian literature, is informed by his discussion.

determined self have confronted arguments over the issue of gender. Is anatomy destiny or is one's gender an assumed subject position, part and parcel of a package of ideological constructs masquerading as "natural" attributes? In Villette, Lucy's sense of who and what she is--the nature of her self--most definitely includes her sense of herself as biologically female. But the world in which Lucy lives allows no evident disjunction between biologically based identity (femaleness) and socially constructed and mediated identity (femininity). In Lucy's experience, "to be female" means "to be a woman" means "to be vulnerable," to face the specter of powerlessness. As I have argued is the case with the poetic persona of Charlotte Smith in Elegiac Sonnets, Lucy Snowe's voice is that of a woman "prey to victimization" and "textually conscious of ... femininity."³ However, Lucy will not finally rest with playing the role of the passive, suffering victim. Something within her will not allow her to do so; something within her rebels, and in subversive ways which highlight the artificiality of her "natural" role.

Part of that "something within her" is her Romantic temperament, a temperament that Lucy presents to us as endemic to her. This Romantic temperament is made visible by Lucy's often simultaneous attraction to and fear of Imagination, her sensitivity and responsiveness to Nature,

³Curran, "The I Altered" 199; Homans, WW&PI 3.

her use of memory, her solitariness--characteristics which all, in one way or another, have to do with a concern with extending the boundaries and the power of the self.

Lucy's relationship with the Imagination, particularly her imagination, is an intensely conflicted one. She seems to see the Imagination as dangerous to her development as a self-authorizing subject; she associates it with emotion and passion, qualities potentially threatening to rationality and, more to the point, self-control. Lucy does not name herself in her own narrative until the opening paragraph of Chapter 2, and then her words sound more like a deposition than an introduction: "I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination. . . ." (14). The reader is not surprised to find that the next word in this sentence is "but," for, as Mark Kinkead-Weekes says, "[t]he voice protests too much" (177). Eugenia DeLamotte notes: "Lucy protests that she is not passionate and imaginative and artistic, that she did not desire too much. . . . But because there is no one to accuse Lucy of such crimes but herself, the very act of self-defense, as in the Gothic dream of perpetual unjust accusation, is an admission of guilt" (257). Through much of Lucy's narrative, she does vehemently decry passion and imagination, insisting instead upon her cool, level-headed nature. But her very narrative betrays her. As we read, we find Lucy receiving guidance from night skies, revelling in

storm, and, by the power of that very imagination she so decries, seeing an English river as the Styx and a crippled old woman as a witch, a sorceress, Malevola the evil fairy. And, of course, she will more than once be "haunted" by the image of a ghostly nun. But a series of events which occur in Chapter 7 perhaps best illustrates the intensity of Lucy's imaginative power and the intensity of her struggle to deny it; this chapter also illustrates the ways in which Nature and memory are linked with imaginative power.

After informing us of the "tradition that Madame Beck's house had in old days been a convent" (130), Lucy introduces the story of the nun who was supposedly buried alive in the garden. But, as if sensing that her narrative is verging on Romance or Gothic, Lucy pulls herself up: "Independently of romantic rubbish, however, that old garden had its charms" (131). As much as Lucy may want to dismiss all that smacks of "romantic rubbish," however, the paragraph which follows bears witness to her attraction to and investment in the spirit of Romanticism. She describes the garden and her enjoyment of it in sensual-spiritual terms, not unlike those one might find in the poetry of Keats: "On summer mornings I used to rise early to enjoy them [the garden's "charms"] alone; on summer evenings, to linger solitary, to keep tryst with the rising moon, or taste one kiss of the evening breeze, or fancy rather than feel the freshness of dew descending." She takes special note of a "smaller, more

sequestered bower" in which vines "gathered their tendrils in a knot of beauty, and hung their clusters in loving profusion about the favoured spot where jasmine and ivy met and married them" (131). While Judith Lowder Newton is certainly right about the sensuous imagery of this passage suggesting "Lucy's hidden longings . . . both sexual and romantic" (108), the lush language and imagery of this scene also bespeak Lucy's Romantic longings--longings for just such sensual-spiritual communion with Nature, longings for transcendence.

Later we will see Nature as guide, Nature as stimulus; Nature is animate in this scene, too, appearing here as a lover: "'One moment longer,' whispered solitude and the summer moon, 'stay with us'" (132). Lucy hears this whisper one summer evening while sitting on the stone bench which she has "reclaimed from fungi and mould" in "l'allée defendue," the alley which runs between the pensionnat garden and the backs of the boarding-houses of the neighboring college. Forbidden to the students and shunned by the other teachers, this alley attracts Lucy from the beginning: "From the first I was tempted to make an exception to this rule of avoidance [of the alley, especially after dusk]: the seclusion, the very gloom of the walk attracted me" (132-33). Lucy tells us that "fear of seeming singular" led her to avoid the alley at first, just as others did. But eventually she seeks out the overgrown,

"forbidden" place which will offer her solitude. In a characteristic move to disguise/neutralize that which might be perceived as self-assertive (or "singular," as Lucy terms it), Lucy obscures the significance of this forbidden alley and her appropriation of it by suggesting that she found the courage to venture into it only when others had become accustomed to her doing "peculiar" things: "as people became accustomed to me and my habits, and to such shades of peculiarity as were engrained in my nature--shades . . . born in and with me, and no more to be parted with than my identity--by slow degrees I became a frequenter of this straight and narrow path" (132-33). Lucy's attribution of her desire to venture into the forbidden alley to "shades of peculiarity . . . engrained in [her] nature" is significant in that it illustrates Lucy's sense of herself as someone attracted to gloom and seclusion at the same time as it illustrates her quest for the forbidden, for a less-traveled path. And Lucy's last phrase is intriguing as well. A devout Protestant, she knows that "straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14). A forbidden, overgrown path is associated in Lucy's mind with the way "which leadeth unto life."

This may seem a strange association at first until one considers Lucy's options of female selfhood. Lucy may admire Madame Beck's competence, her self-possession, her

self-control (and her ability to control others), but Madame is also seen by Lucy as heartless: "to attempt to touch her heart was the surest way to rouse her antipathy, and to make of her a secret foe. It proved to her that she had no heart to be touched: it reminded her where she was impotent and dead" (90-91). Ginevra Fanshawe has station, youth, and beauty, but her vanity, superficiality, and cruelty make her a woman Lucy would not aspire to be, even if she could. Paulina (Polly) Home is certainly kinder and more self-governing than Ginevra, but she is a countess, lovely, and well-beloved by a doting father, and thus in possession of attributes and privileges Lucy can never hope to have. But beyond this, there is something about Paulina which piques Lucy from the very beginning; Paulina lives for one thing only--to serve and be loved by a man (her father and then Graham Bretton). Although she is supposedly a grown woman when Lucy encounters her again in Villette, Paulina is still "an airy, fairy thing--small, slight, white--a winter spirit" (373). In other words, she has not changed from that small child which inhabited Lucy's bedchamber at Bretton, that being which provoked Lucy's first self-declaration and her first denial of her own imaginative nature ("I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination. . .") because this being seemed rather to "haunt" Lucy's chamber than to inhabit it (14). Paulina (Polly) Home does haunt Lucy; she

does so because she (Paulina) is the image of the ideal Victorian woman.

Witness one of the earliest images of female self-abnegation in the text: Polly as a small child sitting next to her father's elbow, engaged in the feminine task of hemming a handkerchief and "pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon swerving from her control--inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly" (18-19). Here is the image of Polly which most qualifies her for Kate Millett's title for her: "baby-goddess" (258). Here is Lucy's image of ideal Victorian womanhood: passive, silent, "pricking herself ever and anon," proving her womanliness by shedding her own blood. Lucy knows she cannot be Paulina for she (Lucy) lacks the elfish insubstantiality as well as the beauty, wealth, and position needed to play the role convincingly, but she could mimic the role; she could play the Angel in the House--but to whom, in whose house? Again, the circumstances of Lucy's material existence contribute to her ability, or inability in this case, to perform certain roles assigned to women. DeLamotte points out some significant similarities between Lucy and Polly including their displacement from home as children, their hard-won self-control, and their love (and loss) of Graham Bretton; "But Paulina is the heroine of Gothic comedy who is restored

to Home, gains a fortune, and is reunited with the beloved she lost at first. Lucy's experience is the opposite. The difference between them is that Paulina is attractive and wealthy, while Lucy is neither" (249). So, finally, what are Lucy's options for female selfhood: Madame Beck's heartless self-possession and control, Ginevra's egotism, Paulina's self-abnegation? None of these seems a legitimate option for her, either because material and social barriers prevent her or because her own "nature" rebels. If she is going to lay claim to a different version of female selfhood than those she sees around her, she must indeed traverse an overgrown and forbidden path; the path must be cleared of these images (DeLamotte calls them "mystifications") of womanhood if Lucy ever hopes to lay claim to self-definition.

Finally, this recognition of the possibility that the ground may be cleared, that self-definition may be possible is exactly why this narrow path is "forbidden," for it is a no-(wo)man's-land between the enclosed, feminine space of a convent garden and the back walls of a boy's school, a space which by its very existence and by its very narrowness emphasizes the existence of the walls (those which lock one in and those which lock one out) at the same time as it reveals the very real possibility that these walls can be breached.

The forbidden alley makes one aware of boundaries, of

differences. As Lucy sits in the forbidden alley late one evening, she hears the curfew bell. Lucy-the-narrator is struck by the fact that "[t]he same hour which tolled curfew for our convent, which extinguished each lamp and dropped the curtain round each couch, rung for the gay city about us the summons to festal enjoyment" (133); yet she insists that this younger Lucy sitting on the stone bench thought no such thing:

Of this contrast I thought not, however: gay instincts my nature had few; ball or opera I had never seen; and though often I had heard them described, and even wished to see them, it was not the wish of one who hopes to partake a pleasure if she could only reach it--who feels fitted to shine in some bright distant sphere, could she but thither win her way; it was no yearning to attain, no hunger to taste; only the calm desire to look on a new thing. (133)

We have already seen Lucy declare herself unimaginative; here she declares herself undesiring and unaspiring; again, she protests too much, too vehemently. "Calm desire" seems oxymoronic, and Lucy's protestation is soon undercut, once again, by the imagery and language of her own narrative.

The moon, one of the Romantics' favorite symbols for the creative imagination, appears throughout Villette, and many times we find Lucy regarding, even reading, the night

sky.⁴ In this instance, Lucy gazes at the moon, "not a full moon but a young crescent," and remembers her childhood:

Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I could feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future--such a future as mine--to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature" (134)

Again, Lucy reveals that her "nature" is anything but cold, calm, and submissive; she must struggle make it appear that way.

But it is perhaps too tempting to label all Lucy's attempts at self-restraint unhealthy. Ironically, self-reserve may make possible just that--the reservation of the self. In "Passionate Reserve and Reserved Passion in the Works of Charlotte Bronte," John Kucich brings Foucault's observations about desire, repression, and subjectivity to bear upon Bronte's fiction. Like Foucault, Kucich contests the assumption that "repression is a sign of victimization" (69). He posits instead that reserve can become "the sign of a radical self-transcendence" (80) as it engenders a "self-reflexive circulation of feeling" which "compresses

⁴Robert Heilman argues that the moon, symbol of the White Goddess, interrupts the text, representing the eruption of feeling, imagination, intuition into a narrative of one supposedly devoted to the God of Reason.

subjectivity only to open it to a transcendent pitch" (81). In a his final paragraphs, Kucich suggests a provocative possibility: so-called Victorian reserve may actually serve to engender a Romantic self:

The great question of the Victorian novel--what does it mean for individual subjects to be part of a community?--is answered implicitly by these novelists' promotion of reserve: not much. The romantic self engendered by reserve, ungraspable and unknown even to itself is inherently unsharable and claims an origin outside of relationship. . . . Reserve appears to be available for the advantage--one might say even the "fulfillment"--of certain individuals within the very culture that tries to oppress those individuals by imposing reserve from without.

Kucich hastens to add that reserve is "a double-edged tool" and to note that its "effect . . . depends entirely upon who controls its significance" (86). But the point is well-made as it applies to Lucy. For, as I will argue later in this chapter, Lucy does on occasion use reserve precisely in the way Kucich suggests--as a means of self-affirmation or preservation. Furthermore, this understanding of reserve (as productive rather than destructive of selfhood) may do much to explain the paragraph which follows Lucy's statement that she "studiously held the quick of [her] nature," for

such an intense effort of self-restraint does indeed seem to engender a scene in which Lucy's "nature" is shown in all of its Romantic glory.

As we will see throughout her narrative, Lucy is highly susceptible to the influences of Nature. Immediately after her discussion of the moon, her reference to her childhood, and the resolution to keep a tight reign on her "nature" which the memory of it provokes, Lucy recalls her dread of "whatever could excite": "certain accidents of the weather, for instance . . . woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy." She remembers: "One night a thunderstorm broke; a sort of hurricane shook us in our beds: the Catholics rose in panic and prayed to their saints. As for me, the tempest took hold of me with tyranny: I was roughly roused and obliged to live." While all the other residents of the pensionnat (including, we presume, the intrepid Madame Beck) "gathered round the night-lamp in consternation, praying hard," Lucy dresses herself, climbs out of her window and onto the ledge, and, with her feet resting on the roof of an adjoining building, revels in the tumult: "It was wet, it was wild, it was pitch-dark." This is no Byronic hero with his cape swirling around him in the wind; this is "calm," "cool" Lucy Snowe: "I could not go in: too resistless was the delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, pealing out such an ode as language never

delivered to man--too terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts" (134).

Lucy cannot disown her response to the storm; it is too immediate, too intense. The storm brings something to the surface which she is constantly trying to beat down, to deny--her desire for transcendence: "I did long, achingly, then and for four-and-twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards." But this "longing"--like the Imagination and, as we will see, like memory--is threatening to Lucy's sense of self-control. So what she once tried merely to "hold," she now attempts to kill, but, again, with limited success, for what she is trying to kill is so much a part of her that its destruction would quite possibly mean hers as well:

This longing [for transcendence], and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head; which I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench; then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core. (134-35)

The violence of the imagery reflects the intensity of Lucy's struggle. To construct a livable life, she feels she must

control, even destroy, the longings which traditional wisdom regarding women's nature says she cannot have. But Lucy's Romantic nature is at war with this prescriptive narrative of female nature. One of the weapons at Lucy's command is her imagination, the same imagination which she often tries to deny or disown. Another weapon, closely related to the imagination and often working in tandem with it, is memory, and it is important to return to that scene in which Lucy remembers her childhood to trace Lucy's conflicted relationship with it.

The scene in which Lucy regards the moon and remembers her childhood also serves to suggest the importance of memory in her struggle to forge a self apart from the images of womanhood which surround her. Janice Carlisle reveals that Charlotte Bronte read several autobiographical works in 1849 and 1850 (she began Villette in 1851); among these works in which memory is depicted as "the source and proof of personal identity" were Tennyson's In Memoriam and the posthumous 1850 edition of Wordsworth's Prelude (266). Both works present speakers struggling against loss, attempting to combat it, in part, through the use of memory. But memory, like Imagination, is a potentially dangerous power. We must recall that Lucy's childhood seems to have been marked by pain, fear, loss--such intense pain, fear, and loss that she refuses to speak of it directly, fearing perhaps that speaking specifically of it would summon the

pain into the present and de-stabilize an already tenuous sense of self. As Carlisle notes: "To relive the sorrows of the past is to revive their pain; to relive its joys is to relinquish them once more" (270). Perhaps this is what Lucy senses about memory, and this is why she is so evasive regarding her childhood, so suspicious of memory's power. Memory is all about loss; by its very existence, it is "proof" of loss. Yet memory can also be compensatory, even recuperative. And it is this potential attribute of memory which leads us to the answer for an as-yet unasked question: If Lucy fears memory so much, why has she chosen to write an autobiography? At some point, Lucy discovers that memory need not be only something to which we are subjected; it may also be used in the service of subjectivity.

Lucy's use of memory is imaginative in the most Romantic sense of the word. She creates/re-creates a self through her narrative. Carlisle comments:

Lucy's writing of her story in the first and second volumes is itself the activity that allows her to triumph over her earlier inability to confront the implications of memory. . . . She finds consolation in an otherwise barren past by systematically and continuously reversing the roles which the facts of her story impose on herself and her fellow characters. Particularly in Volume II, each of the major characters

becomes an objectified version of Lucy's personality or experience--until together they become a way of positing at least a symbolic or vicarious fulfillment of her desires. . . .

Memory, for Lucy, achieves all the status that the Romantics attribute to the imagination. (279)

But we must not perceive of this process of creation as taking place within a vacuum. Lucy does choose to write an autobiography, not a diary; she wants, she needs an audience for the self she is struggling to create, a self which will not be invisible or misread. We are made aware of this in part through her frequent interpolations of the reader(s).

Brenda Silver argues:

Knowing, however, that she cannot trust others to perceive her as she is--that even when she is not invisible she is more than likely to be misread--Lucy goes one step further: she projects her readers into the landscape of the novel, the text, and asks them to use their imaginations in a mutual act of creation which in turn validates her own emerging self. (90; my emphasis)

Lucy seems to know what Frankenstein's Creature learns, much to his sorrow: it is not enough to tell one's story; one needs to be heard to "signify."

Imagination and memory are intrinsic to Lucy's struggle to construct a self which can express itself and be heard,

yet, as we have seen, they are powers which Lucy sometimes sees as threatening to that embryonic self forming throughout her narrative. It is interesting to note, then, that at the very heart of her narrative, in Chapter 21 of the 42-chapter text, Lucy gives up all attempts at denial, all fear of the Imagination as she embraces--and worships--it as "Sovereign complete," "Deity unquestioned," and "daughter of Heaven" (288). This scene is provoked by an innocent-enough exchange with Graham. Having returned Lucy to the pensionnat after her recuperative stay at La Terrasse, Graham promises to write. Lucy wonders if he will, and then considers how she will answer his letters if he does. Reason (whom Lucy refers to as a "hag") warns her against such communication. To Lucy's anguished "But if I feel, may I never express?", Reason declares, "Never!" (287). What follows is Lucy's most whole-hearted embrace of Imagination; even if it cannot alter the material circumstances of her life, it "holds [her] secret and sworn allegiance":

According to her [Reason], I was born only to work for a piece of bread, to await the pains of death, and steadily through all life to despond. Reason might be right; yet no wonder we are glad at times to defy her, to rush from under her rod and give a truant hour to Imagination. . . . We shall and must break bounds at intervals, despite the

terrible revenge that awaits our return. Reason is vindictive as a devil: for me, she was always envenomed as a step-mother. If I have obeyed her it has chiefly been with the obedience of fear, not of love. (287)

Lucy's encomium continues for several more lines, and it does not end before she openly swears the allegiance which has, until this moment, been secret: "Divine, compassionate, succourable influence! When I bend the knee to other than God, it shall be at thy white and winged feet, beautiful on mountain or on plain" (288).

Lucy's unequivocal worship at Imagination's throne strengthens her for the days ahead, but still she struggles to maintain her fearful obedience to Reason; she struggles because she feels she must obey Reason if she is to live, even marginally, in society. As Terry Eagleton points out in Myths of Power, there is a constant struggle in Charlotte Brontë's fiction "towards a balance or fusion of blunt bourgeois rationality and flamboyant Romanticism" (4). Referring to the Brontës and "other Romantics," Eagleton posits that their plight was indicative of a "general historic phenomenon: that of the Romantic imagination being beaten down by society, stifled and shackled by mechanistic routine, hammering hopelessly at external limits" (11). Lucy is certainly suffering a "beating" of sorts at the hands of society, but, as we have already seen

in the passage regarding Jael and Sisera, the violence of this beating is increased exponentially when the "enemy" is internalized--when Lucy feels that she must fight herself at the same time as she is struggling to make a place for herself in a society which seems anything but welcoming. Speaking in general of heroines in Charlotte Bronte's fiction, Eagleton asserts: "The heroine admires this life-style [of the Romantic heroes in the novels] because she lives it also--but lives it as guilty secret, as submerged, unspeakable fantasy. She needs to negotiate her own undeclared Romanticism in terms of a real world. . ." (76). As we have seen in her ambivalent relationships with Imagination and memory and in her Romantic sensitivity to Nature, Lucy is trying "to negotiate her own undeclared Romanticism in terms of a real world." These attempts at negotiation reach new heights of intensity when, instead of the natural world or parts of herself, Lucy must deal with the presence--or more often, absence--of other people.

Lucy is solitary. But she is not the solitary who, sick of society's hypocrisy and materialism and anxious to rest within the bosom of a beneficent Nature, quits the company of his or her fellow human beings in disgust. Nor is she the solitary who, hounded by the knowledge of a dark, terrible sin and cut off from the comforts of human contact by the weight of guilty self-knowledge, flees society in a desperate attempt to escape the inescapable. Lucy's

solitariness seems ingrained, immutable. She does not withdraw from society as much as society seems to withdraw from her. As she says after burying Graham's letters at the foot of Methusaleh, the pear tree in the forbidden alley: "If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed" (370). Lucy's "war" is, as I have been arguing, with society and with herself. And perhaps because of this simultaneous battle on both fronts, because she both attempts to play the role assigned her and to subvert it, transforming scripted lines into self-narration, Lucy is something unrecognizable to those around her. Thus, perhaps "withdrawal" is an inexact description of society's response to Lucy. Society fails to recognize Lucy; she never seems to have been part of it to begin with. Like Frankenstein's Creature, Lucy's very origin is shrouded in obscurity and she seems to belong nowhere.

Significantly, Lucy does not mention having parents as a child; she mentions "kinsfolk": "In the autumn of the year ---- I was staying at Bretton; my godmother having come in person to claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence" (6). The "at that time" adds a strange dissonance to the succeeding "permanent residence." Nothing really seems permanent in the young Lucy's life, unless it is her idea of Bretton as a quiet, clean sanctuary, one which it seems she did desperately need but one of which she was bereft very quickly. After the

six-month stay at Bretton during which she meets Paulina (Polly) Home, Lucy returns to her "home":

It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! the amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass--the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest? (43)

Why not, indeed? What Lucy highlights here is the difference between the narrative of protected womanhood and the lived experience of one young woman. She goes on to highlight her sense of powerlessness to alter the horrors (whatever they were) in which she was immersed and to emphasize the imposed silence regarding her suffering which she felt then (as the younger Lucy) and must still feel to a certain extent even now (as the older narrator).

Essentially what she insists upon in the midst of this narrative which often borders on confession is sole ownership of the particulars of this memory. As Karen

Lawrence notes: "For Lucy the conventional pieties about women's lives are nonnarratable, as she lets us know by briefly toying with this picture and then erasing it" (314).

Lucy writes:

Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy. .
 . . However, it cannot be concealed that, in that
 case, I must somehow have fallen overboard, or
 that there must have been wreck at last. I too
 well remember a time--a long time, of cold, of
 danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have
 the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness
 [sic] of briny waves in my throat, and their icy
 pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a
 storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For
 many days and nights neither sun nor stars
 appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling
 out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all
 hope that we should be saved was taken away. In
 fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.
 As far as I recollect, I complained to no one
 about these troubles. Indeed, to whom could I
 complain? (42-43)

The final question is provocative. "To whom could I
 complain?" suggests her absolute aloneness. "To whom could I
 complain?" prefigures a social reality which Lucy will not
 articulate until later in the narrative when Lucy-the-

narrator gives voice to a more mature Lucy who has learned all too well that certain messages--and messengers--cannot, will not be granted an audience:

Also, how very wise it is in people placed in an exceptional position to hold their tongues and not rashly declare how such position galls them! The world can understand well enough the process of perishing for want of food: perhaps few persons can enter into or follow out that of going mad from solitary confinement. . . . Speak of it! you might almost as well stand up in an European market-place, and propound dark sayings in that language and mood wherein Nebuchadnezzar, the imperial hypochondriac, communed with his baffled Chaldeans. (341-42)

Lucy's analogy is incredibly appropriate. For she is in a "market-place." As a nursery governess-turned-teacher in Villette, she has entered the marketplace, exchanging her services for a pittance. But, as a woman, her presence within the marketplace is disturbing for some; her very existence as a woman who works for a wage (rather than one dependent upon husband or father for sustenance) threatens the separate-spheres ideology and gives rise to all manner of fears regarding the stability of a class and gender system built on and around the subordination of women,

particularly women of the "lower" classes.⁵ Like Charlotte Smith, like Frankenstein's Creature, Lucy comes to understand more and more viscerally that complaints of injustice fall upon deaf ears when the complainant's very subjectivity is in question. Thus, "To whom could I complain?" is perhaps the most poignant interpretation of Lucy's question.

That Lucy suffers from her solitariness is evident throughout the text, but the events related at the end of Volume 1 emphasize the destructiveness of this solitude most explicitly. After the bustle of final exams, the "long vacation" ensues. Lucy is much more explicit about the terrors of this dark night of the soul than she was about the eight-year "storm" she endured some years before, but again she emphasizes the crucial role of memory: "That vacation! Shall I ever forget it? I think not" (192). In a passage which understandably moves critics such as Gilbert and Gubar to read Lucy's experience as an outward manifestation of an inward reality, Bronte has Lucy-the-narrator tell us: "the house was left quite empty, but for me, a servant, and a poor deformed and imbecile pupil, a sort of cretin whom her stepmother in a distant province would not allow to return home" (193). Lucy is left to care for this cretin, "a last nightmarish version of herself--

⁵For a fuller discussion of the governess as the focus of ideological anxiety in nineteenth-century England, see Poovey's Uneven Developments.

unwanted, lethargic, silent, warped in mind and body, slothful, indolent, and angry" (Gilbert and Gubar 414), "a needy and demanding ego [which] does not speak" (DeLamotte 236). The onerous burden of caring for this "cretin" combined with solitude drives Lucy to a terrible despair. This "cretin" literalizes Lucy's worst fears about and for herself--that self "abandoned" by a godmother (not the evil stepmother of fairy tales, but the god-mother who has disappeared and left Lucy to fend for herself in a hostile world), that self whose need and whose inability to express it amplify one another. Driven by the manifestation of utter inarticulate powerlessness and a terrible dream in which even the "well-loved dead" fail to recognize her (197)--two "visions" which declare that she has finally been rendered both voiceless and invisible--Lucy ventures out into the night. Finding herself in a Catholic church, she attempts to find solace through confession; like Bretton, this is a sanctuary, but not her sanctuary. She goes back into the night, a stormy night by this point, and ill and disoriented, she collapses before she can reach shelter.

When Lucy's soul "re-enter[s] her prison with pain" (207), Lucy finds herself in a transplanted Bretton. The Brettons, after having suffered loss of fortune in Britain, have journeyed to Villette to re-build their lives and fortunes. We are finally explicitly told that Dr. John, whom we have seen several times in Volume 1, is actually

John Graham Bretton, and that Lucy has known this for some time. Lucy has chosen not to make herself known to Graham, and she has chosen to keep her reader in the dark as well. Why? Lucy tells us that she didn't reveal her identity to Graham because her anonymity brought her pleasure: "I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through, while he stood before me under a ray of special illumination" (219). But as Lucy's narrative continues, we realize what Lucy-the-narrator knows, though the Lucy who first awakens at La Terrasse (the transplanted Bretton) might only suspect: as far as Graham is concerned, her presence is always going to be "covered with a cloud." To him she is "a being inoffensive as a shadow" (394); but, more precisely, she is a nonentity. And Lucy, at least Lucy-the-narrator, suspects that she knows the reason why Graham reads her as a shadow; she muses: "Had Lucy been intrinsically the same, but possessing the additional advantages of wealth and station, would your manner to her, your value for her have been quite what they actually were?" (392).

Before Lucy tells us that Dr. John is Graham Bretton, she allows us to observe her observing him:

He laid himself open to my observation, according to my presence in the room just that degree of notice and consequence a person of my exterior habitually expects: that is to say, about what is

given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner's work, and carpets of no striking pattern. (119)

As a nursery governess, and a plain nursery governess, Lucy is not perceived by Graham as anyone at all. Her regard of him, therefore, is all the more shocking. Does one expect a piece of furniture to be capable of observation? When he catches Lucy studying him with "a direct, inquiring gaze," he responds with surprise and "annoyance": "Mademoiselle does not spare me: I am not vain enough to fancy that it is my merits which attract her attention; it must then be some defect. Dare I ask--what?" (120). This is Lucy's perfect opportunity to reveal herself, but she chooses not to do so: "There is a perverse mood of the mind which is rather soothed than irritated by misconstruction; and in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think in being consummately ignored" (121). We will encounter this "perversity" again when we see Lucy interacting with the literature professor, M. Paul Emanuel. The Lucy who encounters Paul has learned her lesson: if one is going to be misread anyway, one might as well "write" the misleading script.

To this end, Lucy purposely stays silent and appears unmoved at times, leading Karen Lawrence to wonder if "invisibility is not also a strategy . . . , specifically a strategy to avoid being 'textualized' or read" (307) and

Brenda Silver to ask if it is not possible that "by this silence Lucy is creating a script other than that in which the lost god-brother/prince reappears and rescues her from her changeling role" (107). We have already seen her adopt this "strategy" with Graham. She will do so with Paul on more than one occasion, provoking him to emotional extravagances which will set the stage for her own emotional responses.⁶ As Kucich has argued, "repression" need not be read always as unhealthy. As I have argued is the case with Mary Shelley's "self-veiling" in her original, anonymous publication of Frankenstein, Lucy's self-concealment is very close to and, in fact, a step toward self-possession. In Lucy's case, self-concealment or reserve often does signify and even produce power, in particular the power to revise and/or re-write her assigned, already-scripted role.

Lucy's quest for self-authorization and expression and the complex maneuvers involved in the veiling and/or displacement of that quest make of her narrative one long, complex dance--a performance in which agency is often masked by assumed passivity and submission, yet may be enacted and expressed in subversive ways. Two incidents which illustrate this impulse toward agency and subversion within a character who is often read by those around her (and often presents herself) as cool, detached, and passive involve

⁶See, for example, the scene in which Lucy purposely allows Paul to believe that she has not brought a present to his fete (Chapter 29).

Lucy's journey from England to Villette and her performance of the role assigned her in the play directed by M. Paul at a fete given to honor Mme. Beck.

The complex way in which Lucy justifies her daring move from England to a foreign land (both to herself and to her readers) bears close inspection; she is intent upon obscuring her agency, displacing it by attributing the impetus for her actions to Nature and to an obscure Fate or Destiny. Bereft of family, friends, and employment, Lucy goes, "as a last and sole resource," to consult Mrs. Barrett, her former nurse who is now housekeeper at a mansion nearby (52). On her way, she walks alone through dark fields; no cottage nearby, no moonlight, only a "moving mystery" shines in the sky. In a Wordsworthian moment of mysterious communication with/through nature, Lucy, completely alone on a dark night, experiences something other than fear at the sight of this "solemn stranger," the Aurora Borealis: "Some new power it seemed to bring. I drew in energy with the keen, low breeze that blew on its path. A bold thought was sent to my mind; my mind was made strong to receive it" (53). This evocation of a powerful Nature working upon and strengthening a receptive mind is familiar to any devotee of Romantic poetry, and this "scene of dedication" with the "fervour of its expression" reminds one scholar of Wordsworth's dedication of his life to poetry in Book 4 of The Prelude (Ewbank 158). But the "bold

thought," the guidance given Lucy by the mysterious night, is different from the guidance one might expect to find in a poem by Wordsworth. "'Leave this wilderness,' it was said to me, 'and go out hence.'" To her query of "Where?" Lucy's unidentified guide gives her a vision: "gazing from this country parish in the flat, rich middle of England--I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes; I saw London" (53). Leaving the natural "wilderness" for the London of the mid-nineteenth century might seem a most unRomantic impulse, but Lucy's "wilderness" is not that of Nature; it is the artificial desert of non-opportunity for sustenance, let alone growth, by which she is surrounded.

As I have already argued, Lucy's susceptibility to Nature is one element of her Romanticism. But her almost obsessive concern with obscuring her desire and determination by invoking Nature as motivating force is specific to her as a female Romantic. What is of special interest here, at this crucial moment in her story, is Lucy's insistence upon passivity: "A bold thought was sent to my mind; my mind was made strong to receive it" (53; my emphasis). This insistence upon passivity is soon joined by an insistence upon downplaying the courage involved in Lucy's adventure: "In going to London, I ran less risk and evinced less enterprise than the reader may think. In fact, the distance was only fifty miles" (55). But the distance

from Lucy's country parish to London is not nearly as noticeable as the distance Lucy tries to put between herself and her adventurous action. As Newton observes: "The influence of the aurora borealis . . . which on one level suggests Lucy's difficulty in leaving what is known, functions on another level to assure the reader that Lucy is not as unfeminine and daring as she seems: reader, the aurora borealis made me do it" (100). Lucy feels that, as a woman, she cannot fully own the desire for quest or the determination to pursue this desire, so she displaces both desire and determination onto Nature. She is demonstrating a Wordsworthian "wise passiveness," but it is more necessary--and more "wise"--for her to appear to be passive than it ever was for Wordsworth. As a Romantic, she is supposed to be passive in order to be taught by Nature; as a woman, she has already been taught that she is passive--passive by nature.

When Lucy does see London with her "bodily eyes," her quest is off to a none-too-promising start. "[O]n a dark, raw, and rainy evening," she arrives in London, which she refers to as "a Babylon and a wilderness." The "strange speech" around her strikes her as a "foreign tongue," and she is disoriented by the noise and the crowds (55). Both her linguistic disorientation and her sense that the place she felt led to go to escape a "wilderness" is simply another (or perhaps the same, at least in kind) "wilderness"

are suggestive, even foreshadowing. For, as we know, Lucy's quest will eventually lead her to a foreign land, a land for which she will choose to sail although she knows she does not speak the native tongue. And in a very real way, Lucy's entire journey, throughout her narrative, will be through the wilderness. Nina Auerbach reads Lucy's predicament, of being "alone in a foreign country whose culture is always alien to her," as indicative of a movement from a Wordsworthian "sense of immanence linking man [sic] to the universe" to "Hardy's vision of man homeless in an alien landscape" (204) and reads her narrative as the story of the "modern" subject, an "isolated and estranged self, reaching toward a reality that can coalesce into nothing beyond projection" (211). Gilbert and Gubar classify Lucy's journey as "mythic": "out through the unconscious toward selfhood" (406). Certainly Lucy is on a quest, a journey towards a Promised Land (of autonomy and domestic affection) which, she, like Moses, will be allowed only to glimpse.

Despite her insistent attempts to soft-pedal the daring nature of her journey, alone in a small rented room on that first night in London, Lucy is overwhelmed by the precariousness of her situation:

All at once my position rose on me like a ghost.
Anomalous, desolate, almost blank of hope, it
stood. What was I doing here alone in great
London? What should I do on the morrow? What

prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do? (57)

This is certainly not the last time a "ghost" will rise to confront Lucy; her precariousness will not diminish until the very end of her narrative, and more than once a "ghost" will come to remind her of that precariousness. But what is even more striking about this passage is its similarity to the questions of another "anomalous" creature seeking selfhood. Learning of life through a crack in the wall between the DeLacey's cottage and his hovel, Frankenstein's Creature asks similar questions, and similar answers are implied. As a woman possessing neither wealth nor position, neither family nor friends (and lacking as well the beauty which might offer some hope of acceptance), Lucy is in a situation quite similar to the Creature's. When she reaches Villette, she, too, will need to learn the language of the culture in which she hopes to find a place.

After she has wept, said her prayers, and composed herself for sleep, Lucy hears a "deep, low, mighty tone swung through the night": "At first I knew it not; but it was uttered twelve times, and at the twelfth colossal hum and trembling knell, I said: 'I lie in the shadow of St. Paul's'" (57). Indeed she does. As a woman, and a woman who embraces Pauline Christianity, she lies in the shadow of an ideology built upon the teachings of St. Paul, he who

"suffer[is] not a woman to teach," he who commands her recognition of her natural, God-ordained subordination to man. Like the Creature, Lucy will strive to construct and express a self radically at odds with the self (or non-self) assigned her. What will make Lucy's struggle so enormous, and often so amorphous, is her investment in the very ideology which, with its emphasis on patriarchal selfhood and power, denies her what she seeks. Lest we miss the importance of this conflict between Lucy's earnest investment in Judeo-Christianity and her desire to be more than what she is told she is, Bronte has Lucy encounter another Paul who will attempt to remind her of her "nature," who will shame her for her passion and her rebellion (two characteristics that it seems only he can see), but who ultimately will aid her (as I will argue later) in her quest for self-construction and expression. Bronte will call his name Emanuel--Paul Emanuel. But to reach him, Lucy must first traverse this "wilderness" of London, and then cross over to an even more foreign land.

Despite the inauspicious experiences of the night before, Lucy's first day in London proves to be energizing. She tours the city, making "crossings" on her own and experiencing "perhaps an irrational, but a real pleasure" (59). In a departure from Romanticism, specifically the Romanticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lucy revels in the life of the city: "its business, its rush, its roar," its

earnestness at "getting its living" (59). After returning to the inn for nourishment and rest, Lucy decides upon another "line of action," one which, this time at least, she is willing to name "daring": she will book passage on a vessel sailing that very night "for a certain continental port" (60).

Upon Lucy's arrival in Villette, she finds herself in an even more precarious position. Of course, no one is there to meet her; it is dark, her luggage has not arrived with her, and she does not speak the language. Lawrence observes: "Her situation is emblematic: she is the image of the powerless female, without the keys to the culture or the power of its privileged discourse" (315). Although she garners some kindness and assistance from "a true young English gentleman" (he ascertains the fate of her luggage, gives her the address of an inn, and escorts her through the park), Lucy is far from safe. After Graham has left her (much later in the text, Lucy informs us that the English gentleman was indeed her godmother's son, Dr. John Graham Bretton), she must make her way alone through what appears to be one of the "better" parts of the city: "On I went, hurrying fast through a magnificent street and square, with the grandest houses round, and amidst them the huge outline of more than one overbearing pile; which might be palace, or church--I could not tell" (78). Graham's assumptions regarding where Lucy would be safe and where she would not

are intriguing. He asserts that "'it is too late and too dark for a woman to go through the park alone,'" yet leaves her to travel the rest of the way to the inn (down two more streets) by herself (77). Why? Perhaps the park is "public" domain--and thus more likely to attract the "lower orders"--while the streets which run through an affluent area suggest the security that material wealth is supposed to guarantee? Not for Lucy, not for a woman alone. As if sensing that Lucy does not "belong" here, or merely finding a woman alone a tempting target for harassment, two men step from behind the pillars of a nearby building: "they were smoking cigars, their dress implied pretensions to the rank of gentlemen, but, poor things! they were very plebeian in soul. They spoke with insolence, and, fast as I walked, they kept pace with me a long way" (78). When Lucy and her hunters encounter a patrol, the hunters abandon the pursuit. But the chase has managed to completely disorient Lucy; in fleeing from them she has strayed from the path prescribed by Graham and is now utterly lost. Paternal (or fraternal) goodwill and guidance is rendered useless in the face of male hostility and coercion.

Lucy's insistence upon passivity is merging with an emphasis upon happenstance as she attempts to explain away the temerity involved in her quest for employment. According to Lucy, lost but still hoping to stumble upon the inn Graham recommended, she finds herself upon the doorstep

of a "Pensionnat de Demoiselles" and makes yet another leap of faith--she rings the doorbell and asks to see Madame Beck (whose name is inscribed on a brass-plate outside the door). Again, Lucy claims passivity: "Fate took me in her strong hand; mastered my will; directed my actions. . ." (79). Intriguingly, at this point, her linguistic disability may benefit her: "I believe if I had spoken French she [the "bonne" who answers the door] would not have admitted me; but, as I spoke English, she concluded I was a foreign teacher come on business connected with the Pensionnat, and, even at that late hour, she let me in. . ." (79). Lucy's interview with Madame Beck follows. Attempting to come to a decision about hiring this unknown Englishwoman who has appeared on her doorstep, Madame seeks council from her cousin and we meet M. Paul Emanuel for the first time. Madame asks him to "read" Lucy's countenance, which he does--pronouncing that he sees "bien des choses," both good and bad, written there (81-82). Madame decides to risk employing the unknown Englishwoman; Lucy is hired as nursery-governess, then promoted to English teacher after proving herself capable of managing the "jeunes filles" (which the professedly backward Miss Snowe does with aplomb, even locking one especially truculent young woman in a closet).

Lucy's new responsibilities challenge her and provide her with opportunities for self-actualization:

My time was now well and profitably filled up. What with teaching others and studying closely myself, I had hardly a spare moment. It was pleasant. I felt I was getting on; not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use. (100)

But, in the midst of such "progress," achieved through remarkable industry on Lucy's part, her insistence upon her retiring temperament remains firm. As a yearly celebration at the pensionnat, Madame's fete, approaches, each student and teacher prepares herself by donning a "gala uniform": "A clear white muslin dress, a blue sash (the Virgin's colours), a pair of white, or straw-colour kid gloves" (161). But there is a notable exception to "this diaphanous and snowy mass"; Lucy Snowe, despite her name, chooses not to wear the "uniform," not to become a part of this ethereal, insubstantial "mass." She chooses a dress of "crape-like material of purple-gray" (162). Lucy tells us that she "felt at home and at ease" so attired, "an advantage I should not have enjoyed in anything more brilliant or striking" (162). Lucy implies that she has chosen this "gown of shadow" in order not to "stand out"; but, of course, it is her difference which will do just that. Where would a "shadow" seem more substantial than against a backdrop of diaphanous white? Lucy has

effectively asserted herself, her difference, her substantiality, all the while maintaining her demure persona, insisting upon her desire to remain in shadow.

Furthermore, it is important to note what Lucy notices about the "uniforms" of the students and other female teachers; dressed in white and blue, the others wear "the Virgin's colors." Lucy's vehement anti-Catholicism is in evidence throughout her narrative, and her staunch (and often vocal) adherence to Protestantism serves further to set her apart from those around her. However, Lucy's choice of purple-grey over white and blue becomes even more suggestive when one recalls that the building now housing Madame's school for young girls was once a convent, the convent rumored to have been the home of a young nun "buried alive, for some sin against her vow" at the foot of a "Methuselah of a pear-tree" still standing in Madame's garden (130-31). Lucy refuses to wear the "Virgin's colors" just as she will refuse to live the young nun's fate; although she, like the ghost of the unfortunate girl, may appear to others as a "shadow"; she will resist being "buried alive," resist being rendered invisible.

As I have attempted to show, Lucy's journey to Villette, her securing of employment, and the manner in which she conducts herself once inside the walls of the pensionnat all demonstrate an interplay of self-assertion and denial of self-assertion. But nowhere is the complexity

of Lucy's performance of subjectivity more cogently presented, or more literally represented, than in the scene in which Lucy is virtually drafted by M. Paul into playing a role in the "vaudeville" to be presented on the night of Mme. Beck's fete.

When one of the girls falls ill on the night of the performance and must be replaced, Paul drafts Lucy into theatrical service; once again, Lucy may act (this time, literally) behind the veil of external goading: "I will not have you shrink, or frown or make the prude. I read your skull, that night you came; I see your *moyens*: play you can; play you must" (164). Paul's insistence upon Lucy's capabilities may be overshadowed by his domineering manner, but his belief in her "*moyens*" never wavers. Despite M. Paul's definitely conflicted feelings regarding women and the pursuit of knowledge, he cannot be accused (as Graham can, for instance) of underestimating Lucy and her abilities. As Carolyn Platt points out:

He scolds her with outbursts abusing "women of intellect" and praising "feminine mediocrity." However, he never stops teaching her or leaving her interesting books to read. He never stifles her with accusations of stupidity or inability, but accuses her instead of knowing more than she actually does--of knowing Latin and Greek. The effect is not to discourage Lucy, but, quite the

contrary, to goad her along. (23)

This scene in which Paul insists that Lucy can and must perform is the first of many scenes in which this "fiery little man" seems to goad Lucy into acts of self-assertion (166).

But it is my argument that Lucy's acts of self-assertion, though certainly provoked by Paul's "goadings," are not produced by it; he may stimulate, quicken the desire within her (for self-expression, learning, even for him), but he does not create it. When Paul accuses her of possessing a "contraband appetite for unfeminine knowledge," Lucy muses:

Alas! I had no such appetite. What I loved, it joyed me by any effort to content; but the noble hunger for science in the abstract--the godlike thirst after discovery--these feelings were known to me but by briefest flashes.

Yet, when M. Paul sneered at me, I wanted to possess them more fully; his injustice stirred in me ambitious wishes--it imparted a strong stimulus--it gave wings to aspiration. (441)

Obviously, aspiration was not nonexistent; it was merely grounded. And referring to her own surprise at the pleasure she took in acting in the vaudeville, she says: "A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature" (174; my emphasis). Having repeatedly

asserted that hers is a decidedly un-dramatic nature (as she will continue to do throughout the narrative), this revelation draws attention to itself by its very contradiction and signals its truth both by Lucy's immediate move to repress it ("it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by. . . [174]) and by the actions which we see Lucy perform throughout the novel which illustrate it (going out frequently in night and/or storm, embracing attitudes and behaviors which despite her protestations to the contrary serve to emphasize her difference rather than to downplay it). So, inasmuch as Lucy may be "horror-struck" at the idea of performing on stage (164), she does so, and does so with relish. For, by its very nature, the role allows her to express desire and, at the same time, to deny that it is her desire which she expresses; Lucy's role is that of a man.

In order to play the role of this "empty-headed fop," this "butterfly, talker, and traitor" (165), Lucy must adopt his language and his appearance. To ensure that she learns her lines, Paul locks her in the attic, purported to be the favored haunt of the ghost of the young nun. On this occasion, however, Lucy's fellow inmates are rats, black beetles, and cockroaches. As darkness descends, Lucy becomes (understandably) more fearful: "the beetles were fading from my sight; I trembled lest they should steal on me a march, mount my throne unseen, and, unsuspected, invade

my skirts" (167). Here, gothic dread of the loss of bodily integrity (often suggested in gothic texts by the threat of rape and/or unwanted pregnancy⁷) is suggested, but trivialized; fear of lascivious villains is replaced by fear of vermin (or perhaps we are simply dealing with metaphor here?). Susan Wolstenholme goes as far as to say that "Circumstances that are treated with pathos in Lucy's life-- she is alone, isolated; she actually could starve to death-- are treated comically here" (70). Lucy's vulnerability is underscored nonetheless. The reader cannot help but remember that other woman, in an earlier Charlotte Bronte text, locked away in an attic. Luckily, Lucy does not have to burn the house down to escape; after hours in the stifling heat, the hungry but obedient Lucy (having learned her lines to the satisfaction of M. Paul who was listening on the other side of the locked door) is set free. (One cannot help but wonder if Bertha Mason Rochester might have been released earlier too--if only she had submissively "learned her lines.")

Lucy has internalized the language, and now she must take on the external indicators of her role; here we see, once again, the significance of dress in Lucy's quest for self-assertion and expression. She agrees to don the accoutrements which will signify "man" but insists upon

⁷For a provocative discussion of this last element of "Gothic fear . . . as the fear of femaleness itself," see Kahane's "The Gothic Mirror."

retaining that which will signify what she sees as integral to her selfhood. Lucy proclaims her determination not once, but twice: "I would keep my own dress" (171). To Paul's insistence that she "must have something to announce [her] as of the nobler sex," Lucy replies: "'And I will, monsieur; but it must be arranged in my own way: nobody must meddle; the things must not be forced upon me. Just let me dress myself'" (171-72). And Lucy does dress herself, being sure to maintain that which she sees as a signifier of her self: "Retaining my woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletot of small dimensions. . . ." (172).

Lucy's cross-dressing is, of course, provocative. Eugenia DeLamotte argues that Lucy is haunted by an "androgynous nature,"^a one that "deprives her of satisfaction in a world that has no name for legitimating such a nature and no language in which such a nature can explicate the mystery it has therefore become" (280). Wolstenholme, however, draws a distinction between suggestions of androgyny and what she sees as a more subversive move on Lucy's (and Bronte's) part:

Lucy's ambivalently gendered dress is not really androgynous or bisexed but alternately sexed, like

^aDeLamotte is discussing the "ghost" of the nun at this point, but the suggestion of androgyny by Lucy's portrayal of a man makes DeLamotte's comments relevant here as well.

a reversing figure. The audience sees a woman dressed partly as a man and partly as a woman wooing a woman. She retains the accoutrements of her female sexuality in the lower half of her body while taking on a man's character in the upper part. (70)

According to Wolstenholme, this "ambivalent sexuality" involved in Lucy's performance is related to Bronte's assumption of the Currer Bell pseudonym (70), two acts which serve to emphasize the "fictiveness" of much "masculine discourse" regarding women's identity (72).

DeLamotte also highlights the artificiality of gender identity when she explores the irony involved in the "true identity" of the ghostly nun which appears and frightens Lucy on more than one occasion: the nun is being "played" by a man, Alfred de Hamal, the actual "fop" who uses the nun's habit as a disguise to meet secretly with the vacuous Ginevra Fanshawe, who plays the coquette to Lucy's "fop" in the vaudeville and whom Lucy (as the "fop") is determined to woo away from the gallant "Ours," associated in Lucy's mind with John Graham Bretton)! When Lucy finds the empty nun's habit on her bed near the end of Volume 3, even before she has found Ginevra's letter revealing that de Hamal had been "playing" the nun, Lucy does not scream or swoon: "I tore her up--the incubus! I held her on high--the goblin! I shook her loose--the mystery! And down she fell--down all

around me--down in shreds and fragments--and I trode upon her" (587).

Whether one reads the ghostly nun which haunts Lucy through most of the text as "a projection of Lucy's desire to submit in silence, to accept confinement, to dress in shadowy black, to conceal her face, to desexualize herself" in a socially acceptable way (Gilbert and Gubar 426), a symbol of Lucy's repression and a Gothic/Romantic eruption in a "realistic" Victorian novel (Jacobus 48-49), or as the "literal embodiment" of her "waking nightmare," a materialization of her own tortured psyche and thus a validation and a demystification of her psychic pain (Shuttleworth 330-31), Lucy's unabashedly passionate and rebellious response is telling. She has come a long way from the passively suffering persona she presented to us (and to herself) in the earliest parts of her narrative. As Wolstenholme points out regarding the aforementioned scene, there's a "blank space" where a woman's body should be (68), and it is against this "blankness," this sense of herself as a nonentity, that Lucy must struggle. Her struggle is rendered all the more difficult because she often wages it, or feels she must wage it, covertly.

Similarly, the success of de Hamal's disguise depends in part upon his silence. Were he to speak, a male voice would reveal the disguise as disguise. DeLamotte argues that the nun does not speak because "its masculine voice

would reveal the feminine nun self for what it is: none, no one, a mystification" (280). Perhaps this dread of being "found out," of having the mask ripped away and the "real person" underneath revealed, is part of Lucy's fear of her own voice when she must take the stage in the vaudeville. For, interestingly enough, Lucy tells us that she does not suffer from stage fright: "it was not the crowd I feared, so much as my own voice" (173).

Lucy's fear of her own voice is related to her fear of being perceived as self-assertive (or, to use Newton's term, "self-interested" [103]); this fear drives her to attribute her acts of daring to the workings of Fate and to insist upon her calm temperament and her lack of Imagination. Lucy's fear also bears a striking resemblance to the Creature's fear of his voice in Shelley's Frankenstein, the fear of a creature attempting to "signify" in his/her "master's" language.

In his attempt to convince his creator to recognize him as something other than a "monster," the Creature launches into his autobiography (and it is important to recall here that this is exactly what we are supposed to be reading in Villette, Lucy Snowe's autobiography). Near the beginning of his narrative, he mentions his early desire to express himself, a desire which has, by the time he tells his story to Victor, become the primary focus of his life: "sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the

uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again" (Shelley 81). Here, the Creature presents an image of himself as infant to his reluctant father. Inarticulate, vulnerable, and (at the narrative point which he recalls) still innocent of the crimes which drive Victor to seek to destroy him, the Creature which Victor sees as monstrous from its inception is frightened by the sound of its own voice.

Similarly, Lucy tells us of her fear of a speaking role in the vaudeville: "That first speech was the difficulty; it revealed to me this fact, that it was not the crowd I feared, so much as my own voice" (Bronte 173). Unlike the Creature, and unlike Charlotte Smith, Lucy's aim in this play is not to move her listeners to sympathy or to action (though that may well be her aim in the autobiography as a whole²). She does not fear, love, or need the audience at the fete: "Foreigners and strangers, the crowd were nothing to me" (173). Her fear is that of venturing into language. For although she may be speaking the lines of a male character, hers is still a female voice. In the aforementioned passage from Frankenstein, the Creature fears his pre-linguistic voice; not yet introduced into a Lacanian Symbolic order, he has not yet acquired that "godlike science" of language. But he fears his voice nonetheless because of its difference, its "uncouthness" when compared

²See Kinhead-Weekes (182-83) and Williams (73-74).

to the natural music of the birds. Even in this pre-linguistic state, the Creature recoils from his own voice because, uneducated as he is, he perceives his difference; his awareness of the extent of his difference will only increase as his experience increases, much to his despair and his misfortune. And his awareness parallels, as I argued in the preceding chapter, Mary Shelley's awareness of her "difference" as a woman writer, an awareness which manifested itself in her means of self-construction and presentation as an author (including the "veiling" of identity and authorial agency).

Charlotte Bronte definitely felt the weight of such an awareness as well; she presented herself to the general public as Currer Bell, an androgynous-sounding name which Bronte hoped would deflect the "prejudice" often encountered by "authoresses." It is important to note that she published Villette in 1853 under this pseudonym, even though she had revealed the Bells as Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte in an 1850 "Biographical Notice":

Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; . . . we did not like to declare ourselves women, because--without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine"--we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with

prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery which is not praise. (qtd. in Ewbank 1)

But Lucy asserts that she does not fear the "chastisement" of the "critics" which might be attending the play, only her own voice. Could Lucy be attempting to deceive us--or, more precisely, herself--as I have implied she does when she insists upon presenting herself as inactive and retiring when her actions suggest the opposite? No, for such additional veiling of intent and agency is unnecessary in this instance. Lucy's self-assertion is perfectly camouflaged already by the role she is understood to be playing. Ironically enough, she need not disguise her voice, only her body--and, as we have seen, only by the addition of clothing; no subtraction of feminine gender markings are necessary: "When my tongue once got free, and my voice took its true pitch, and found its natural tone, I thought of nothing but the personage I represented--and of M. Paul, who was listening, watching, prompting in the side-scenes" (173). Lucy need not fear that her audience will confuse her with her role; she may be as outrageous, as aggressive, as traitorous as the role allows (and more so), all the while maintaining her "natural tone."

Both Lucy's experience in the vaudeville and with the ghostly nun serve to suggest the performative nature of both

subjectivity and gender. As Sally Shuttleworth argues: "The construct 'Lucy' is not a unified mental entity, located within a physiological frame, but rather a continuous process which extends beyond the confines of the flesh" (331). She continues: "Identity, as Bronte has shown throughout Villette, is not a given, but rather a tenuous process of negotiation between the subject and surrounding social forces" (332). The word "process" is crucial, for that is what we see in Villette: the process of self-formation. Lucy becomes more fully herself as her narrative continues; further, she becomes more fully herself through her narrative. In her Preface to Gothic (Re)Visions, Susan Wolstenholme introduces two concepts which will be central to her reading of Gothic literature, that of "woman" as a "textual position" and performance as a metaphor for the act of writing. In her reading of Villette, Wolstenholme explores the ways in which Lucy's performance in the vaudeville parallels Bronte's career as a writer: both women "retain a measure of control by acquiescing" to the requirement that they don the "accoutrements of a man"--for Lucy this means adding pieces of a man's clothing to her own; for Bronte this means adopting a pen name which may be assumed to be that of a man but does not directly lay claim to a masculine identity (70-71). This type of performance subverts the subject-object dichotomy which relegates women to object, rather than subject, positions.

Speaking specifically of Lucy's performance in the vaudeville, Wolstenholme writes:

Directing attention to the artifice of what she is doing, Lucy's performance resembles Lucy Irigaray's mimicry of patriarchal logic in Speculum de l'autre femme: imitating and marked by male discourse, she makes available a "feminine" logic in its blank spaces. Fostered by imprisonment and starvation, scripted and directed by men, Lucy's performance triumphantly becomes a woman's art which rewrites the terms into which women are forced, not by ignoring or transcending masculine discourse but by using it deliberately and calling attention to its fictiveness. (72-73)

"A woman's art": imitative and subversive, concerned with speaking "I"¹⁰ yet constantly calling into question the nature of the self, revealing it as more process than product--it would be dangerous, I think, to posit this as a definition/description of any woman's art (or especially all women's art), but it certainly seems to describe Lucy's autobiography.

¹⁰My use of this same term ("At the center of Romantic discourse is a speaking 'I'") pre-dates my reading of DeLamotte's text. However, since I am using the term here as she uses it in her thesis (that "speaking 'I'" is a central concern in gothic fiction by women), I have placed it within quotation marks.

Autobiography is the battleground upon which the battle for self-definition is waged. As Linda Anderson so rightly points out:

the woman who attempts to write herself is engaged by the nature of the activity itself in re-writing the stories that already exist about her since by seeking to publicise [sic] herself she is violating an important cultural construction of her femininity as passive or hidden. She is resisting or changing what is known about her.

(59)

In the course of her narrative, we see Lucy resisting more and more, refusing the "scripts" which are presented to her, refusing to "perform" as expected. Her resistance can be seen as early as her performance in the vaudeville. Yes, she learns her lines. But she plays the role so emphatically, with such relish, that she effectively revises it: "Retaining the letter, I recklessly altered the spirit of the role" (174). Further into the narrative, we see her refuse to perform as Polly's governess (371-72) then as Graham and Polly's matchmaker (395). More and more we see Lucy wanting to write her own lines; less and less is she willing to accept fiction as truth about herself.

Although many critics like to explore the rich scene in which Lucy buries Graham's letters as the moment in which Lucy's attempts to repress her own desires are rendered the

most visible and the most symbolic,¹¹ I would argue that the scene in which Graham asks Lucy to help him woo Paulina Home (the "little Polly" of the old Bretton days, the "airy, fairy thing" who displaces Lucy not once but twice) and Lucy feels "an inward courage, warm and resistant" is worthy of a closer look:

With a now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a role not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke. (395)

This realization, though painful, is "welcome" because Lucy is at war with fictions of herself, and she cannot combat what she does not recognize. We saw a foreshadowing of this war in Lucy's clearing of the forbidden alley, but here we see Lucy's resistance to such fictions more openly expressed. Her recognition of the fact that Graham can never truly "recognize" her (in a similar way that Victor can never "recognize" the Creature) clears the path for the growth of her relationship with Paul, a man who sees her as

¹¹See, for example, Mary Jacobus' insightful reading of this scene in "The Buried Letter." Although I agree with Jacobus that Lucy attempts to repress her Romantic (and romantic) impulses and that this repression is only incompletely successful (leading to "eruptions" within the narrative), like Moglen, I read Lucy's burial of the letters more positively--as a "survivor's" act of "self-preservation" (Moglen 212).

anything but a shadow, who "responds to the spark of her being instead of the shadow of her seeming" (Moglen 217).

Paul's response to Lucy is not always positive, of course. Often he frowns, he disapproves, he criticizes, and even berates, but Lucy is finally able to make him "see" her. A short scene in Chapter 28, which immediately follows the chapter in which Lucy receives with "welcome force" the recognition of Graham's figurative blindness, is symbolic of the movement toward relationship and mutual recognition between Lucy and Paul. While engaged in one of their verbal sparring matches/power struggles, Lucy breaks Paul's glasses:

I gently pushed the bonnet towards his hand. Thus impelled, it slid down the polished slope of the varnished and unbaized desk, carried before it the light steel-framed "lunettes," and, fearful to relate, they fell to the estrade. A score of times ere now had I seen them fall and receive no damage--this time, as Lucy Snowe's hapless luck would have it, they so fell that each clear pebble became a shivered and shapeless star. (411)

Lucy has not just broken Paul's glasses, it seems; she has shattered them. Dismayed and penitent, she awaits his wrath. But Paul, like Lucy, can be perverse; "Ah, traitress! traitress! You are resolved to have me quite blind and helpless in your hands," he responds, smiling

pleasurably and benevolently (412). DeLamotte comments that Lucy breaks Paul's glasses "in an action symbolic of her resistance to the kind of reading of which he is capable" (250). I would feel more comfortable with this statement if DeLamotte did not seem to be implying here and throughout the next few pages of her text that Paul unerringly sees The Truth of Lucy's character. Paul does indeed see "sparks" of Lucy's Romantic nature--including the rebellion against oppression which she tries so desperately to hide, even from herself--but he, too, often misreads her (for example, when he reads Lucy as coquettish when she is actually refusing to serve as Cupid for Graham and Paulina). Instead, the shattering of the lenses through which Paul sees Lucy may be more indicative of her resistance to being perceived by Paul as a sign which he can interpret, a text which he can read. For such a configuration places her, once again, in the position of object, rather than subject. In breaking Paul's glasses, Lucy is, to use Karen Lawrence's terminology, resisting textualization.

Despite the fact that Lucy and Paul become engaged, we find Lucy at the end of her narrative solitary once again (or, more accurately, solitary still). Paul has been away on business three years, during which time Lucy has been running her own pensionnat (the building secured and furnished for her by Paul, but only the first year's rent in her possession when he leaves); Lucy confides to us:

"Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life" (614). Lucy has a degree of autonomy which she has never before possessed, and, secure in Paul's love for her, she has the hope of a future completely different from anything she has known in her past. But, while awaiting Paul's return, Lucy ends her long narrative abruptly; Paul, lost in a storm at sea, will never return. But Lucy is incredibly evasive here, as evasive as she was about the metaphoric (we assume) "storm" which left her homeless and orphaned as a child:

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said.
 Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny
 imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive
 the delight of joy born again fresh out of great
 terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the
 wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of
 return. Let them picture union and a happy
 succeeding life. (617)

As she did before, Lucy invites us to "picture" a fiction, but she leaves us with "the truth of an emotional agony which cannot be simply wished away" (Eagleton 73). Inga-Stina Ewbank comments:

Theoretically Charlotte Bronte has left the ending of the novel open--and she jokes with her publishers about the merits of a do-it-yourself denouement: 'Drowning and Matrimony are the

fearful alternatives'--but the overall tone of the novel allows no alternative but drowning to Paul Emanuel, when the storm which has been Lucy Snowe's evil genius throughout the novel assails him. (202-203)

It has taken Paul and Lucy the entire narrative to come together; now Bronte wrenches them apart in the last pages of the text. Why? Judith Lowder Newton argues that Paul is "sacrificed to Bronte's sense of possibilities":

The combination of love and quest, of autonomy and subordination, of being what a woman should be and of being more, was simply too good to be true; it was a private fantasy, worked out in isolation from the forces of the larger world, and, finally, Bronte knew it. (124)

Gilbert and Gubar claim that the "ambiguous ending of Villette reflects Lucy's ambivalence, her love for Paul and her recognition that it is only in his absence that she can exert herself fully to exercise her own powers."

Furthermore, they claim that the ending "also reflects Bronte's determination to avoid the tyrannical fictions that have traditionally victimized women" (438). All of the above arguments are based upon valid interpretations, but I tend towards a perhaps less sophisticated answer to the "why?" of Paul's abrupt extraction from Lucy's life and narrative--I do not think Bronte, in all good conscience,

could write what she could not envision: a marriage of female self-possession and domestic (marital) affection, of woman as self-authorized subject and woman as wife.

Moglen notes that

it is Bronte who must try to reconcile the heroine's independent self-realization with her need to be submerged in the powerful, masculine 'other.' For Bronte it had always been impossible to accommodate these two commanding impulses which psychosexual conditioning and social reality place in extreme conflict. (225)

Thus, perhaps Newton is right when she says that Paul is "sacrificed to Bronte's sense of possibilities"; what she could not see as possible (woman as self-authorized subject and woman as wife), she could not, or would not, write.

I began this chapter by describing the bleakness of Lucy's situation: I termed her "a woman struggling for survival (both material and psychic), self-possession, and at least the possibility of happiness." I described the external oppression and internal repression against which Lucy must battle. But I do not read her, as Eagleton does, as being "reduced to a Romantic victim" (89), at least not by the end of the novel. Like Michelle Masse, I want to emphasize "not just what is done to women but what they do about it" (3). And Lucy does a great deal. She may lose Paul, and this loss is not inconsequential to her, but she

does gain a greater sense of self-ownership, and a place in the society in which she had been a foreigner, an alien, a shadow. DeLamotte argues that

In both Jane Eyre and Villette, the longing for transcendence, despite impassioned hymns to Imagination or ecstatic vision of the moon . . . , amounts in the end to the "modest hope" of getting beyond the boundaries of the self to commune with other people--most intensely with one special person--and, without fear, take a meaningful place in society. (285)

Lucy may lose that "one special person," but she did experience that intense communion, even if only briefly. And she has taken that "meaningful place in society." The end of Lucy's narrative may not be romantically satisfying, but, as I have argued, it may have been the only ending that Charlotte Bronte could write for Lucy Snowe.

Born the same year that Mary Shelley's Frankenstein was conceived, Charlotte Bronte published Villette pseudonymously in 1853; it was her last novel. Elizabeth Barrett Browning published her "novel in verse," Aurora Leigh, four years later.

What Lucy was striving for (the marriage of self-authorization and definition with domestic affection) Aurora, it seems, achieves. But even with her more optimistic vision of the possibility of such a marriage,

Barrett Browning expresses some of the same concerns, Aurora faces some of the same struggles, and when the narrative concludes, we are once again left standing at a threshold--proving perhaps one more time that for women who seek, as Anderson would say, to write themselves, self-construction and expression remains a process which resists completion.

CHAPTER 4

The Voice of the Bard:
Aurora Leigh and Romantic Self-Making

In her essay on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh, Virginia Woolf argues that Aurora, "with her passionate interest in social questions, her conflict as artist and woman, her longing for knowledge and freedom, is the true daughter of her age." Woolf reads Aurora and the "sense of life in general" in the text as "unmistakably Victorian" (229), but I will argue differently. Aurora Leigh is a Romantic work, both in form and content, written by a Romantic woman writer. It chronicles the growth of Aurora as a female Romantic bard/heroine and narratively facilitates the construction of her transformed, re-visioned self. Apocalyptic, dedicated to the Romantic ideals of revelation, revolution, and reintegration, and narrated by a female poet-prophet, Aurora Leigh is not just visionary--it is re-visionary, and places its author squarely in the company of poets we refer to as Romantic.

The categorization of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a Victorian poet often rests upon the assumption that historical "period" determines poetical identity--that complex of concerns, subjects, themes, and style which characterizes a writer. Historical context is far from irrelevant to poetic identity, but writers, like all subjects, are (to use the terminology of post-structuralism) multiply determined. Much more than time

period needs to be considered when categorizing a writer (or work) as Romantic or non-Romantic. Still, even if one were to consider time period as a criterion of categorization, there is much to recommend Barrett Browning as a Romantic writer. In her 1995 study of the poet, Marjorie Stone calls her a "Romantic revisionist," a transitional figure between the Romantics and Victorians (9). Stone provides a useful contextualization:

Elizabeth Barrett was born in 1806, eleven years after Keats and six years before Browning. Her first published works . . . pre-date the appearance of Tennyson's juvenilia. . . . Her formative years therefore belong to the Romantic, not the Victorian period. (49)

In her 1986 study of Barrett Browning, Angela Leighton narrows the context even further: "The most powerful literary influence on Barrett Browning's work naturally comes from the Romantic poets, and from Wordsworth in particular" (12-13).

Although Barrett Browning traces her avid reading and admiration of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron back to her childhood (her introduction to Blake, Shelley, and Keats came later), her love of their poetry is not something she outgrew. As a grown woman, she referred to Wordsworth as the "king-poet of our times" (qtd. in Stone, EBB 58). The pronoun is significant; clearly she did not see herself as

living in a different "time" than Wordsworth. In 1842, her praise is even more elaborate; she calls Wordsworth "the poet-hero of a movement essential to the better being of poetry" and the "poet-prophet of utterances greater than those who first listened could comprehend, and of influences most vital and expansive" (qtd. in Leighton, EBB 13). Such unstinting praise is certainly part of the reason Leighton goes on to call Barrett Browning the "Victorian daughter of the Romantic poets" (13). But the father(s)-daughter model is misleading, for, as much as Barrett Browning truly admired the Romantic poets, she saw them as "contemporaries"¹ more than fore-runners and behaved accordingly. Wordsworth praised the "genius" of Elizabeth Barrett's 1838 volume of poetry and, having received a copy of her poem "The Dead Pan" in 1843, sent her part of an unpublished poem of his own (Stone, EBB 27-29). From exchanging poems with the "king-poet" of her time, to commenting freely upon a certain lack of human warmth in the poetry of Percy Shelley (that "high, & yet too low, elemental poet, who froze in cold glory between Heaven and earth" [59]), to conversing with them in the best way she could while living as an invalid in the late '30s and early

¹Stone quotes from a letter written by E.B.B.: "Byron, Coleridge . . . how many more? . . . were contemporaries of mine without my having approached them near enough to look reverently in their faces . . . and young as I was, I cannot get rid of a feeling of deep regret that, so, -- it shd. have been" (EBB 49).

'40s--in her own writing, Barrett Browning kept spiritual company with Bloom's "visionary company."

From the Preface to The Battle of Marathon (written in her eleventh year) in which she cites Byron as the first of her "contemporaries" and affirms that "poetry is the parent of liberty" (qtd. in Stone 59), through her ballads, sonnets, essays, and up to the work she identifies as "the one into which my highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered," Aurora Leigh,² Barrett Browning's work demonstrates her Romanticism. Stone cites the following commonalities between Barrett Browning and the male Romantics:

[L]ike the Romantic poets, Elizabeth Barrett was fascinated by the mysteries of consciousness and the power of the mind in meditation. . . . [She] was drawn to major Romantic poetical forms such as the lyrical drama and the visionary poem incorporating an internalized quest romance. . . . [H]er writings reflect the continuing attraction of Romantic Prometheanism, the Romantic cult of transcendent artistic genius, Romantic tropes of the sublime and the revisionary struggle with Milton and Dante. (10-11)

Emphasizing, as I do, Barrett Browning's Romantic

²from Aurora Leigh's Dedication, dated October 17, 1856.

contemporaneity, Susanna Egan notes:

Barrett Browning, of course, was working quite consciously in the mainstream of the Romantic tradition: this is surely the origin of the autobiographic enterprise, of the confessional mode, of memory, and of subjective perception, as it is of her evaluation of her creative powers. It is from this tradition that she derives her sense of the poet as by now an acknowledged legislator of mankind, her sense of imagination as indeed a spiritual activity connecting the poet with nature, and her sense of a potential golden age. (284)

These are excellent overviews of Barrett Browning's Romantic characteristics, but the characteristics I find most striking when reading her work, and particularly Aurora Leigh, are: her depiction of Nature, its power and our relationship (or potential relationship) to it; her portrayal of the Romantic hero/heroine--that usually solitary seeker of wisdom or truth or love (or all three) who seems to manage to be both rebel and victim, transgressor and transgressed-against at the same time; and her focus on ways of seeing--the revolutionary potential of the human being with a "vision."

In one of her papers on poetry published in the Athenaeum, Elizabeth Barrett identifies the beginnings of

Romanticism with the dawn of greater awareness of and sensitivity to Nature: "Nature, the true mother, cried afar off to her children" (qtd. in Leighton, EBB 66). As I will show later in this chapter, Aurora Leigh's Romanticism (and that of its speaker and author) is made evident in part by the depiction of Nature in the text. But it is not just a heightened sensitivity to and reverence for Mother Nature which Elizabeth Barrett Browning shares with the male Romantics. Like all Romantics, Barrett Browning is a believer in revelation, revolution, and re-integration: the experience and/or flash of insight which gives birth to a renewed and heightened awareness of not just humankind's "fallen"/divided state, but of the need and potential for redemption/re-integration.³ And who is to first experience and then lead this revolution-from-within? Any Romantic will tell you: that man (or woman) of vision, that intermediary between the human race and the Infinite--the Romantic poet.

Does the gender of that poet make any difference--in his/her vision or the way s/he communicates it? Yes. Despite the fact that, as Stone observes, Barrett Browning "did not see herself . . . as writing in a female tradition distinct from the mainstream of English poetry" (EBB 48), she was viscerally aware of the role gender could play in

³M.H. Abrams' Natural Supernaturalism offers a detailed study of this aspect of Romanticism.

limiting one's choices and circumscribing one's life. In a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, Barrett Browning boasts of her failure as a child when it came to performing "the duties belonging to my femineity [sic]" and recalls, "I had a steady indignation against Nature who made me a woman" (qtd. in Leighton, EBB 59). Instead of pursuing her "feminine duties," she immersed herself in books and dreamt of running away to be Lord Byron's page. To a young Elizabeth Barrett, the choice seemed clear: be "womanly" (submissive and self-sacrificing, as she described her mother, of whom she said excessive "womanliness" was her only fault) or be a poet.

This choice and its ramifications played a pivotal role in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's writing--and re-writing--of Romanticism. To the previously-quoted overview of the tenets of Barrett Browning's Romanticism, Marjorie Stone adds this:

Barrett Browning clearly subscribed to many Romantic ideologies, as McGann and others have defined them. But she was also led to question many of these, given the critical distance fostered by her gender. (11)

As for the ways in which Barrett Browning can be seen questioning these "ideologies," Stone mentions a subversion of "the phallogocentric tradition" through a destabilization of narrative authority and the use of "gynocentric

emancipatory strategies" such as "de-centre[ing] masculine metaphors and myths," "transform[ing] silent or marginalized women into speaking subjects, and "represent[ing] women short-circuiting a male economy in which they function as objects of exchange" (13). Kathleen Blake narrows the focus of her argument but makes similar assertions regarding the role of gender in Barrett Browning's poetics in "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Wordsworth: The Romantic Poet as a Woman." Beginning with the admission that "[i]n fundamental ways she [EBB] seems quite Wordsworthian," Blake proceeds to point out significant differences between Barrett Browning and the man she considered a "king-poet" and argues that "She [EBB] does ultimately diverge from him, but not by repudiating a Romantic aesthetic. Rather the divergence comes when it is a woman instead of a man who seeks to become a Romantic poet" (389; my emphasis). According to Blake, the heart of the matter is this--while love and art are presented and seen as mutually nurturing for and by the male Romantic poet, they are made mutually exclusive for the female who would desire the mantle of Romantic bard. Furthermore, Blake claims,

For Wordsworth the main difficulty lies in establishing relations between the mind of man and nature. Barrett Browning faces this difficulty, too, but finds it a secondary manifestation of a more primary difficulty concerning the relations

between people. In fact, both poets link human love with response to nature. . . . What is clear is that he troubles himself about nature more than love, and she, troubled about love, has trouble with nature as well. (391)

When it comes to the relationship between love and art, Blake argues, "What romantic doctrine makes a means to poetic development in the case of men, social convention makes an alternative in the case of women" (395).

Love (read: marriage) or art: this is the choice that Aurora feels she must make, just as it was the choice that Elizabeth Barrett probably thought she had made (or had had made for her). But, as we know, there is a twist to the narrative. Just as her creator found, Aurora finds that socially-constructed binaries can collapse; revelations (not to mention revolutions) are still possible, especially for visionaries. Aurora Leigh is revolutionary, both in the sense that it is Romantic and that it is experimental, a text which narratively embodies one of its principle themes--the reconciliation of opposites.

In Aurora Leigh, we see anew the figure of the Romantic poet-prophet, the Blakean Bard "Who Present, Past, & Future sees," but this bard is unprecedented in Romantic literature for this bard is a woman--problematically, self-consciously, conspicuously female. Since extraordinary narrators produce extraordinary narratives, we might begin a discussion of

Aurora Leigh by trying to ascertain just what this text is. Perhaps the most obvious answer is that it is that more specific type of bildungsroman, the kunstlerroman, a narrative which traces the life and growth of an artist. As Laird points out:

A nonwriter reading the entire poem could glean from it an accurate description of a successful writer's life, of a lengthy career struggle, of writer's blocks, of post-writing depression, and of a writing woman's solitude, courage, self-doubt, and lucky chances. (363)

Laird's exact words are important. Aurora Leigh is not just any writer; she is a "writing woman," and her gender does influence her life as an artist.

In familiar kunstlerromane such as Wordsworth's The Prelude and Tennyson's In Memoriam, gender may disappear as a point of concern or conflict. Issues such as the artist's relationship to nature and his struggle to maintain his faith (in his God, a socio-political ideal, his own ability to be the artist he desires to be) take center stage. But for the nineteenth-century woman artist, gender cannot be irrelevant. Even if the woman writer were to attempt to ignore gender as an issue, considering it irrelevant to her worth as an artist, her audience would not. We saw the truth of this observation in our discussion of Charlotte Smith, Mary Shelley, and Charlotte Bronte. Aurora Leigh,

too, encounters the gender-based dismissals, the prejudices, the praise that is really insult--as when she receives a letter from her friend, a fellow artist, Vincent Carrington: "Fear not, friend;/ We think, here, you have written a good book,/ And you, a woman!" (256-47).⁴ Arguing in a vein similar to Blake's point regarding the difference between Wordsworth's central preoccupations in The Prelude and Barrett Browning's in Aurora Leigh, Alison Case posits that in a male kunstlerroman (she uses David Copperfield as an example), "love and artistic achievement can be made to coincide relatively easily: the male artist's lady-love can always be subordinated to or integrated into his artistic life as assistant or as inspirational Muse." However,

[W]hen the sexes of artist and beloved are reversed, the conventions of the marriage-plot work against the artist's needs. For the woman to lose herself in love, to subordinate her interests and aspirations to those of her love, necessarily means foregoing the self-exploration and intellectual independence needed to develop as an artist. (21)

Even as a young woman, Aurora knows this to be true. She refuses Romney's first marriage proposal because he, devoted

⁴The 1979 Academy Chicago Publishers edition of Aurora Leigh was copied from the last London edition corrected by E.B.B. No line numbers are provided. Page numbers will be cited for all quotations.

to social reform, scorns art--particularly art produced by "mere women"--and because marriage to Romney, desiring as he does an assistant rather than a partner, would mean the end of independence for Aurora: "If I married him,/ I would not dare to call my soul my own,/ Which so he had bought and paid for" (62). Romney reads "woman" and "poet" (at least the kind of poet Aurora aspires to be) as mutually exclusive categories:

Women as you are,
 Mere women, personal and passionate,
 You give us doating mothers, and chaste wives
 Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
 We get no Christ from you,--and verily
 We shall not get a poet, in my mind. (44)

And it is unlikely that Romney was alone in his sentiments. Aurora considers poetry her vocation, but the world in which she lives considers womanhood (producing as it does mothers, wives, Madonnas, and saints) a vocation in and of itself. It is no wonder, then, that Aurora would buy into some of this binary thinking. Part of her task in Aurora Leigh is to bring Woman and Poet together, "to assume a prophet's mantle that is both poetic and personal" (Egan 287), to effect a reconciliation between two roles which have been presented to her as opposites.

Woman and Poet are not the only binaries which Barrett Browning sets about to deconstruct in Aurora Leigh. Writing

to Robert Browning in one of their early letters (years before the actual completion of Aurora Leigh), Elizabeth Barrett wrote:

my chief intention just now is the writing of a sort of novel-poem . . . running into the midst of our conventions, and rushing into drawing-rooms and the like, "where angels fear to tread"; and so, meeting face to face and without mask the Humanity of the age, and speaking the truth of it out plainly. (qtd. in Stone, "Genre" 115)

Running into the midst of convention and speaking the truth out plainly--here, Barrett Browning describes a Romantic writer's *modus operandi*; "where angels fear to tread" is his (soon to be her) home turf. But could not one run into the midst of convention, speak the truth, address contemporary issues within the context of an established form, either poetic or novelistic? What did the creation of a hybrid genre offer Barrett Browning? It allowed her to do with form what she was doing with content; it allowed her to question, critique, and finally dissolve false binaries, creating something revolutionary in the process.

Discussing Barrett Browning's choice of a hybrid literary form, scholars often note that, with her "novel-poem," she was able to have the best of both worlds: the "realism of the novel" and the "potency of poetry" (Egan 287); the potential for detailed character analysis and

commentary on contemporary social issues offered by the novel and the "heightened feeling and language" offered by the poem (Mermin 8). But what is most interesting is the way in which Barrett Browning's novel-poem reflects the revisionary world view presented in this text. As Marjorie Stone observes, "Barrett Browning does not merely mingle genres; she fuses them together" ("Genre" 115; my emphasis). Thus, each form retains its "identity," while the new form created possesses the strengths of both parent forms--just as, we shall soon see, the lovers and soon-to-be spouses Romney and Aurora are meant to do in the egalitarian and highly symbolic marriage which is promised at the end of Aurora Leigh. This embodiment of theme in form is, of course, no accident. In Book 5 of Aurora Leigh, Barrett Browning, the professional writer, has Aurora, the professional writer, assert:

What form is best for poems? Let me think
Of forms less, and the external. Trust the
spirit,
As sovran nature does, to make the form;
For otherwise we only imprison spirit,
And not embody. Inward evermore
To outward,--so in life, and so in art,
Which still is life. (164)

As Stone notes, "This fusion of genres entails a fusion of genders since Victorians viewed epic, philosophic, and racy

satiric poetry as male domains, but thought the novel more suited to female writers" ("Genre" 115). Barrett Browning knew where the line was--between genre and gender--and chose quite consciously to step over it. Barrett Browning did not simply rush into drawing-rooms in Aurora Leigh; she rushed into traditionally male territory.

And thus we come to another way of answering the question of just what this revolutionary text is. In Aurora Leigh, Barrett Browning appropriates the epic, the quintessential medium for male self-definition and self-assertion as a vehicle for the construction and expression of a female Romantic poet. The self in traditionally epic terms is he-who-quests and he-who-battles; in Aurora Leigh the epic self is she-who-writes. Aurora's quest takes her literally and figuratively back to her Motherland (Italy, and her sense of her own womanhood), and what she chronicles in her text is her battle, not with dragons or devils, but (as was the case with Lucy Snowe) with societal expectations and restrictions and her own conflicted feelings about her nature and destiny as a woman. As a young woman, Aurora feels herself called to be a poet, and she refuses to accept what her culture (most notably, her cousin and suitor, Romney) tells her--that she cannot be both true woman and true artist; that, as a woman, wifehood is her highest destiny. Her struggle to find a balance between Aurora-the-woman and Aurora-the-poet, to effect a

reintegration of her own self, is at the heart of her narrative.

Numerous scholars have noted Aurora Leigh's epic characteristics. Stone mentions "the numerous epic similes and allusions, the division into nine books, the in media res narrative order, the epic catalogues . . . , and above all Aurora's (and by implication her creator's) explicitly epic aspirations" ("Genre" 125-26). Stone even reads Aurora's "invocation to herself" at the beginning of Book 5 and "scattered allusions to a male muse that clearly symbolizes forces of inspiration within the writer herself" as replacements for the "formal invocation to a female muse" (126). In her book-length study of Barrett Browning, Stone quotes from a nineteenth-century letter by Charles Hamilton Aide in which he asserts that Aurora Leigh is "an epic, inasmuch as it treats of the passionate struggles, and the half-conquest, half-failure, of two heroic natures [Romney and Aurora] in their life battle" (141). Gilbert and Gubar call Aurora Leigh "an epic of feminist self-affirmation" (575); in her 1984 article on the text, Gilbert reads it as an "epic allegory" (200); Hickok quotes Moers' evaluation of the text as the "epic of the literary woman" (485); Laird titles her essay on the text, "Aurora Leigh: An Epical Ars Poetica"; in his article, "Aurora Leigh: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends," Tucker describes how Barrett Browning utilized "epicizing conventions" (62) to construct a radically new

text and subject. Critical pronouncements affirming that, yes, Aurora Leigh is indeed an epic pile up like epic similes. But one question may continue to nag at a reader's mind even after such an exhaustive catalogue of affirmations: If this is the story of one woman's struggle to achieve reintegration (as I have already argued that it is), is it really "epic"? Can such a seemingly personal story truly be epic? Marjorie Stone deals with this objection by invoking Bakhtin's concept of the "novelized epic," a form in which epic past becomes less distant and "reverence for a valorized, past world of national heroes is replaced by familiarization and laughter" ("Genre" 126). My response to the objection that Aurora Leigh is too personal, its subject and style too familiar or commonplace, to be epic is to situate it, as I have from the beginning, within the context of Romanticism.

Aurora Leigh is "epic," not just because of the particular conventions it makes use of, but because of its depiction of heroism and its suggestion that Aurora is not just one woman--she is representative, even highly symbolic. Thus, her story is not just hers; it can speak of, to, for a culture and a time. She is the Romantic hero(ine) who rebels against man-made systems and restrictions, who privileges her sense of who and what she is and her sense of truth over any authority's, who quests and suffers, holding fast to her belief in her vision. Although Aurora suffers

in the course of her struggle for reintegration, and she suffers in part due to the culture in which she lives, she does not speak as a victim. She speaks from a position of narrative authority: this is her life and her text--it bears her name. This position of narrative authority is similar to the one Wordsworth assumes in his Romantic epic, The Prelude. He may address the story of his life to Coleridge, but he also speaks with the assurance that his story is both individual and representative; as a poet, he can speak to and for others as well. Love of nature led to love of man for him; it can (and will, if given the chance) do so for others. His narrative may be replete with "personal" detail, but, in spirit, it can stand for Everyman's (or, at least, Everypoet's) struggle.⁵ Thus it is with Aurora. She is a Romantic heroine and poet speaking of her personal battles, but one whose personal battles have representative significance. As a female Romantic poet, she both experiences revelation and is that revelation.

Aurora Leigh was envisioned by its author as a "novel-poem"; it is obviously a kunstlerroman, and, as I have just demonstrated, it is an epic. But Aurora Leigh is usually classified as a Victorian poem. It is my argument, however,

⁵Gail Turley Houston makes a similar point when, discussing the kunstlerroman, she argues: "this generic form makes claims that it is representative of everyman at the same time that it formulates a special . . . category for the writer as artistic genius." She goes on to argue that "the paradigm of the artist as universal and unique is grounded in the notion that the artist is male" (213).

that it is distinctly Romantic, both in form and in content. In "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," M.H. Abrams presents five criteria for identifying and interpreting Romantic literature. All five criteria and the explanations/explorations of them which form the five sections of the essay can be used to discuss Aurora Leigh as a Romantic text, but I will limit my discussion to the first four.⁶

In the first of the essay's five criteria/sections, "The Spirit of the 1790's," Abrams discusses Romanticism's roots in revolutionary thought and the revolutionary impulse. As I have attempted to illustrate, Aurora Leigh is revolutionary in its form and its subject. It is also filled with claims for radical equality. More than one Victorian reader must have gasped when Aurora asserted: "If marriage be a contract, look to it then,/ Contracting parties should be equal, just" (123). "Man regenerate in a world made new; this was the theme of a multitude of writers, notable, forgotten, or anonymous" (Abrams 33). Substituting "woman" for "man" as the first word of that sentence would demonstrate one way in which Aurora Leigh

⁶The fifth section, entitled "Wordsworth's Other Voice," deals with the shift in the "voice" of the Romantic poet and in his subject matter--from oracular/bardic discourse to the "real language of men" and discussion of "rustic life." This characteristic is also evident in/relevant to Aurora Leigh, but, as I will discuss some of the issues involved in other places in the chapter, I have chosen not to devote a separate section to the last of Abrams' criteria.

intensifies the revolutionary spirit of an already revolutionary text.

Abrams entitles his second section "The Voice of the Bard." William Blake begins his Introduction to Songs of Experience by thundering, "Hear the Voice of the Bard! / Who Present, Past, & Future sees." Barrett Browning's opening lines sound less audacious, but her bard, Aurora, is no less visionary, no less prophetic. In Book 1 of the text, Aurora describes the moment when, as a young girl, orphaned, and claiming what comfort she could by reading her father's books stored in her aunt's attic, she happened upon "the poets." Her language is apocalyptic; what she is describing is a combination conversion experience and divine calling:

As the earth
Plunges in fury, when the internal fires
Have reached and pricked her heart, and, throwing
flat
The marts and temples, the triumphal gates
And towers of observation, clears herself
To elemental freedom--thus, my soul,
At poetry's divine first finger touch,
Let go conventions and sprang up surprised,
Convicted of the great eternities
Before two worlds. (27-28)

In Book 2, when Romney harshly dismisses her poetry and her "calling," assuring her that if she really wants to do

something "useful," she should marry him and help as he labors for social reform, Aurora insists:

I, too, have my vocation,--work to do,
 The heavens and earth have set me, . . .
 Most serious work, most necessary work,
 As any of the economists'. (52)

Her sense of authorship as a high calling partakes of both epic-bardic and Romantic-bardic paradigms: from Milton who wrote Paradise Lost to "justify the ways of God to man" to Percy Shelley who proclaimed poets "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." As Stone points out, Aurora "unabashedly aspires to become a 'prophet-poet'" and is "repeatedly affiliated with Biblical, classical, and even Muslim prophets and figures of wisdom. . . ." (EBB 145). Aurora succeeds at becoming what she aspires. The text ends with her describing the sunrise to the blind Romney. But this is not just any sunrise; what she sees are "The first foundations of that new, near Day/ Which should be builded out of heaven, to God." In the very last lines of the poem, Aurora invokes the biblical book of Revelation as she describes the gates of the New Jerusalem (351). Herbert Tucker captures the essence of the hyper-revolutionary spirit of this scene: "She herself becomes, in heralding its emergence, the dawning New Jerusalem, the city that may be of God and man but that is a woman. It is finally Aurora who 'makes all new'" (70; Tucker's emphasis). Aurora Leigh,

who, unlike Lucy Snowe, gives her own name to her narrative, is both poet and the subject of the poem, both Romantic bard and Romantic heroine.

Abrams' third criterion for Romanticism has to do with "Romantic Oracles." Discussing Blake, Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge (and, later, Shelley), Abrams explores their "shared attributes" (42). He discusses three in particular: 1) They were political and social poets; 2) Their political/social concerns were often obscured by indirectness ("the politics of vision," uttered in the persona of the inspired prophet-priest"); 3) They tried to incorporate what they regarded as the "stupendous events of the age in suitably great poetic forms" (42-53). Barrett Browning followed the same path. In Aurora Leigh, she critiques women's "education," marriage as it has been traditionally envisioned, and, through the story of Marian Earle, the inequities of the existing class system, prostitution, and illegitimacy. Stone mentions Barrett Browning's references to the "'Tracts' for and 'against' the times," "Parliamentary committees," and "the political fortunes of Guizot and Louis Napoleon in France" (EBB 142). Also, as Stone astutely observes, the intense and conflicting reviews of the text often revealed just how current and controversial the political and social issues being dealt with were, as some reviewers' comments clearly revealed their "ideological agendas" (EBB 139-40). As for

these concerns being obscured by indirectness as visionary discourse is substituted for direct socio-political commentary: despite the fact that Aurora does, as we have already seen, often engage in such commentary, her language is often visionary and metaphorical--as we see in the final scene of the text. The New Jerusalem of Revelation is a metaphor for radical social and political revolution. As we can see from the excerpt from her letter to Browning quoted earlier, Barrett Browning had been planning Aurora Leigh as a text that would directly engage "the Humanity of the age" and "speak the truth out plainly" for years. As a poetic form, she chose the epic, arguably the most "suitably great poetic form" at her disposal.

Abrams entitles his fourth section "The Apocalypse of Imagination" and cites several reappearing terms, images, and agents in Romantic poetry. Several sound as if they have been excerpted directly from Barrett Browning's text: "the purging fire," "the emerging sun," "the dawn of a glad day," "the Apollonian figure of the promise of a bright new order," for example (53-54). "The purging fire" is particularly evocative, given how Romney loses his sight and gains insight: he realizes that his "practical" plans for social revolution are flawed when his home is burned by the very people he thought he was "saving"; while he is recovering, he recognizes the validity of Aurora's vision and the worth of her vocation when her work is read to him.

Thus, Romney, too, has a revelation. Also, Barrett Browning had a long-standing love of and association with figures she referred to as "Fire-thieves!" As Stone points out:

Her comment captures not only the Romantic Prometheanism reflected in her love of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound, which she translated once in 1833 and again in 1845, but also her emulation of her Romantic precursors, all of them 'fire-thieves' too in their rebellious revisioning of their precursors. (EBB 54)

The emerging sun, the dawn of a glad day, the Apollonian figure of promise could all refer to Aurora herself (her name is not incidental, of course) and to the apocalyptic ending of her narrative.

Another comment that Abrams makes in this fourth section is especially relevant to Aurora Leigh: "And the restoration of Paradise, as in the Book of Revelation, is still symbolized by a sacred marriage" (59). The impending marriage of Romney and Aurora at the end of the text troubles many readers who see it as a conservative, bourgeois ending to an otherwise revolutionary text. Is Aurora "selling out"--giving in to societal pressures which have convinced her that, as an unmarried woman, she is somehow not a woman at all? Did Barrett Browning "sell out," opt for a conventional ending because she felt

pressured to provide what her readers expected? The answer to both questions is "no."

As I have already suggested, Aurora is not just an individual woman; she is representative and she is symbolic. So is her approaching marriage. This is the "sacred marriage" which symbolizes the "restoration of Paradise"-- psychic, social, spiritual reintegration. Although Stone does not refer specifically to Abrams' essay or its five "criteria," she, too, notes the "intermixed strains of Romantic revolutionary idealism and millennialism" in Aurora Leigh, links Aurora with the apocalyptic "woman clothed with the sun" mentioned in the twelfth chapter of Revelation, and discusses the way in which the poem's "millenarian discourse" contradicts charges of the conservatism of its ending (EBB 53, 182-83). Along with such apocalyptic allusions, Romney and Aurora's marriage also suggests the reconciliation of opposites: not just male and female, but the Ideal (represented by Aurora and her theories of life and art) and the Real (represented by Romney and his "practical" approach to social reform). Early in her narrative, Aurora comments upon the difference in their world views: "Always Romney Leigh/ Was looking for the worms, I for the gods" (18). Trying to explain poetry's role in the betterment of life, Aurora tells Romney: "It takes a soul,/ To move a body . . ./ It takes the ideal, to blow a hair's breadth off/ The dust of the actual./

[L]ife develops from within" (52-53).

Until personal suffering comes to Romney, however, he does not understand the significance of all such poetic talk of the soul and its needs; to him life is bettered by filling stomachs, clothing bodies, establishing phalansteries. Speaking to Aurora of himself on the night he comes to her in Italy, he describes his revelation:

The man here, once so arrogant
And restless, so ambitious, for his part,
Of dealing with statistically packed
Disorders, . . .
Is now contented. From his personal loss
He has come to hope for others when they lose,
And wear a gladder faith in what we gain.
Through bitter experience, compensation sweet. . .
. (339)

Romney's words are reminiscent of Wordsworth's assertion in "Tintern Abbey" that pain and disillusionment have made him more attuned to the "still, sad music of humanity." But the blind, chastened, but spiritually wiser Romney's sentiments are even more reminiscent of lines near the end of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" Ode (in which, ironically, the poet mourns the loss of a particular kind of sight as well). Wordsworth asserts:

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;

In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering;
 In the faith that looks through death,
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.⁷

Responding to Romney's confession of arrogance and blinding ambition, Aurora insists that she, too, has been guilty of a type of blinding pride. She, whose name (like Lucifer's) suggests shining light, describes herself with words and imagery which suggest parallels with the proud archangel's fall from heaven:

Art symbolises heaven, but Love is God
 And makes heaven. I, Aurora, fell from mine:
 I would not be a woman like the rest,
 A simple woman who believes in love. . . . (341)

She explains how, rooted in her own world view, she could not see the potential for middle ground, for a reconciliation of what she perceived to be oppositional elements (love and art, intimacy and independence):

But I who saw the human nature broad,
 At both sides, comprehending, too, the soul's,
 And all the high necessities of Art,
 Betrayed the thing I saw, and wronged my own life

⁷from William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," lines 179-86.

for which I pleaded. Passioned to exalt
 The artist instinct in me at the cost
 Of putting down the woman's--I forgot
 No perfect artist is developed here
 From any imperfect woman.

Aurora says she has come to see--has been taught to see
 through suffering--that "Art is much but love is more"
 (341).

As for the suggestion that Barrett Browning compromised her artistic integrity or her vision by ending Aurora Leigh with Romney and Aurora's reconciliation and impending marriage, we might do well to consider what she wrote to a friend in the same year she was to marry Robert Browning. She emphasizes the first words of her sentence, drawing attention to her feelings regarding the concept of marriage current in her culture: "Marriage in the abstract has always seemed to me the most profoundly indecent of all ideas" (qtd. in Leighton, VWP 102-03). Would this woman who expressed her criticism of "marriage in the abstract" so emphatically have ended the work she was to see as her "most mature" and "the one into which [her] highest convictions upon Life and Art ha[d] entered" with the promise of something she saw as "profoundly indecent"? Would she have clothed such a "profoundly indecent" concept with words and images suggesting the restoration of Paradise, the coming of New Jerusalem? It hardly seems likely.

Deirdre David considers Aurora Leigh (and particularly its ending) not revolutionary but an expression of Barrett Browning's "conservative sexual politics" and ends her article with the assertion that "In this poem we hear a woman's voice speaking patriarchal discourse. . ." (113, 134). But David's reading of the text is only possible because she is reading Aurora Leigh outside of its context as a visionary, Romantic poem. When David describes Aurora's function as a poet, her very language is steeped in Romantic discourse:

Acting as a cultural agent between a troubled society and transcendent values, the ideal poet performs an oracular function. . . . Empowered through vocation to reveal the organic connections between God, man, culture, and society which have been obscured in a secular world, the ideal poet is made a woman poet in Aurora Leigh. (117)

Yet David seems strangely unconscious of the implications of her own description of Aurora. Aurora is clearly a Romantic Bard, and she is indeed a "cultural agent"; as such she speaks for and represents far more than an individual woman poet. Furthermore, David falls into the very kind of binary thinking which Aurora Leigh is dedicated to exploding. When she discusses the reasons for Aurora's rejection of Romney's first marriage proposal, she seems to forget her own "oracular" description of Aurora's vocation:

It is not Romney's politics that Aurora really objects to when she refuses his proposal, not his desire to fit women into the convenient social slots of wife, nurse, and helper, but rather that he is emotionally barren, as figuratively blind to Aurora's feelings as he is literally blind to her face at the end of the poem. To a sexually vibrant Aurora on her twentieth birthday morning, Romney is a cold fish. (129)

With this reading, David essentializes Aurora (as a "sexually vibrant" young woman put off by her suitor's insensitivity) and reduces her to the petulant, superficial girl-child that Romney seems to think her when he is smarting from her impassioned refusal of his proposal.

David's reading is the most vehement indictment of Barrett Browning's supposedly conservative depiction of Aurora as a woman who finds a way to fuse "vocation" and marriage, but she is not alone in her discomfort regarding Romney and Aurora's wedding. In A Literature of Their Own, Elaine Showalter reads Aurora's desire to marry Romney as evidence of her submission to a Victorian gender ideology which glorifies female "self-sacrifice" (23). Alison Case seems more sympathetic to what she sees as Barrett Browning's limitations due to literary convention: "[She] could not, given the conventions she had taken on in writing a novel-poem, throw away altogether the idea of

marriage as the required telos of a young woman's story--nor even fully subordinate it to a 'higher' aim of artistic achievement." But Case still reads the "plot of poetic 'ambition'" as being in danger from the "undermining influence of the traditional love story" (30). In her 1984 reading of the text, Sandra Gilbert calls Aurora Leigh "quasi-feminist" because Barrett Browning constructs the ending in such a way that "matriarchal apocalypse" requires "male cooperation" (208-09). True, Romney and Aurora are to share the re-visionary power and "cooperate" in their transformative work, but this "cooperation" is part of the egalitarian revolutionary project. As Sutphin points out: "He and Aurora are now capable of an egalitarian relationship, not because he has been diminished [due to his blindness], but because he has grown" (52). Gilbert's article is insightful and productive in its discussion of Aurora Leigh as a "covertly political" allegory, but might not "cooperation" be more "feminist" in spirit than a role reversal in which one sex simply replaces the other in power?

Gilbert's reading, like Case's, Showalter's, and David's, takes Aurora Leigh out of its Romantic context. The ending is meant to be virtually utopian in its suggestion of revelatory vision and radical revolution in ways of seeing; furthermore, it advocates egalitarian union. Both Aurora and Romney are depicted as having had personal

revelations that allow individual psychic/spiritual
 reintegration. They are transformed inside and are now set
 to be transformative in the world which they now see so very
 differently than they did before. Stone attempts to defend
 the ending of Aurora Leigh against Rachael DuPlessis'
 accusation (which is similar to Showalter's) that Barrett
 Browning succumbs to the ideology of female self-sacrifice
 by stating that "Romney clearly intends his marriage to
 Aurora to facilitate her work, not the other way round" (EBB
 186), but Stone does not go far enough here. It is true
 that Romney enjoins Aurora to "work for two,/ As I, though
 thus restrained, for two, shall love!" and that he
 deconstructs the supposed boundary between love and work:
 "Our work shall still be better for our love,/ And still our
 love be sweeter for our work" (349-50). But an important
 point that Stone does not specifically mention in this
 context is that Romney is not now going to "facilitate"
 Aurora's work (the spiritual transformation of the world) in
 a simple reversal of what he wanted her to do for/with him
 when he first asked her to marry. While Aurora learns that
 love and art are not mutually exclusive, Romney learns that
 love and work are not, either. Thus, he specifically refers
 to "our work." The work is not "his" or "hers"; it will
 belong to both of them, but they will both retain their
 individual tasks which require their individual talents.
 Aurora's task is to "Gaze on, with inscient vision toward

the sun,/ And, from his visceral heat, pluck out the roots/
Of light beyond him" (349) because that is her talent--she
is the visionary. There will be a fusion of individuals and
of roles, but fusion is not absorption. Both Romney and
Aurora are strong now. Two pieces of metal may be fused
together, thus doubling their individual strength, but one
piece can not be said to have absorbed the other. So it is
to be with Romney and Aurora, and "the story ends with a
reconstitution of both self and family that provides a
visionary new synthesis of the relationships among men,
women, and children" (Gilbert 200).

Finally, it is significant that Aurora Leigh ends with
the promise of marriage. Barrett Browning does not narrate
for us a scene of domestic bliss but one of radical
possibility. Marjorie Stone observes that what one finds in
the conclusion to Aurora Leigh is "an open-ended apocalyptic
potentiality generating the reader's inscription of meaning"
(EBB 187). This seems to me a much more accurate appraisal
of what the conclusion actually offers us than the readings
which either embrace it as a happily-ever-after narrative or
attack it as a complete betrayal of Aurora's self-
empowerment. The open-ended potentiality of the conclusion
is important for it reinforces the Romantic emphasis on the
creative potential of the imagination. In the same text in
which Abrams' essay appears, Romanticism Reconsidered,
Northrop Frye claims: "Hence in Romantic poetry the emphasis

is not on what we have called sense, but on the constructive power of the mind, where reality is brought into being by experience" (11). At the end of Aurora Leigh, the reader's "constructive power" is called into being. Just as Romney's experiences and Aurora's experiences bring them to the point where their reconciliation and their vision of the New Jerusalem is possible, the reader's experience affects his or her sense of the "reality" of this text.

Romantic in its form, content, and project (of revelation, revolution, reintegration), Aurora Leigh also exhibits its familial relationship to other prominent Romantic writers and texts through textual echoes and evocations. I have already noted similarities between Romney's "compensation" speech and Wordsworth's poetry, most notably his Intimations Ode. In Book 1, Aurora muses upon the nature of the soul:

Let who says

"The soul's a clean white paper," rather say,
A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph
Defiled, erased and covered by a monk's,--
The apocalypse, by a Longus! poring on
Which obscene text, we may discern perhaps
Some fair, fine trace of what was written once,
Some upstroke of an alpha and omega
Expressing the old scripture. (27)

The sentiment expressed is one familiar to any lover of

Wordsworth's poetry; the following lines are from the heart of the *Intimations of Immortality Ode*:

The soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath had else where its setting,
 And cometh from afar;
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home. . . .^a

And this is not the only echo of Wordsworthian thought. In a provocative passage, Aurora's imagery evokes Wordsworth's "Nutting." Preparing to leave England for Italy, Aurora pens a letter to the Lamia-like Lady Waldemar and adds a postscript telling her she need not respond to the letter. Feeling that now she will never see or even hear from Lady Waldemar again, Aurora breathes a deep sigh of relief:

and now I'm out of all the coil;
 I breathe now; I spring upward like a branch,
 A ten-years school-boy with a crooked stick
 May pull down to his level, in search of nuts,
 But cannot hold a moment. How we twang
 Back on the blue sky, and assert our height,
 While he stares after! (195)

Aurora identifies with the branch of the assaulted tree, and

^afrom William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," lines 59-65.

casts the beautiful and treacherous Lady Waldemar, humorously, as a dumbfounded ten-year-old boy.

Echoes of Wordsworth and of Percy Shelley may be heard when the young Aurora claims that poets are the "only speakers of essential truth" (28). In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth claims that a poet should consider himself a "translator"; what he translates is "truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative. . . ." In Shelley's A Defence of Poetry, he states that "A poem is the image of life expressed in its eternal truth."

Aurora may know her Wordsworth and share some of his beliefs, but she calls one Romantic poet by name, and her poetic sketch of him is some of the most powerful poetry in Book 1. Here is Aurora's description of John Keats:

the man who never stepped
In gradual progress like another man,
But, turning grandly on his central self,
Ensphered himself in twenty perfect years
And died, not young,--(the life of a long life,
Distilled to a mere drop, falling like a tear
Upon the world's cold cheek to make it burn
For ever;) (32-33)

Aurora Leigh also bears some striking similarities to the Romantic text which is the subject of my previous chapter, Charlotte Bronte's Villette. Like Lucy Snowe,

Aurora mourns her loveless existence, and longs for the love of one person: "the love of all/ (To risk, in turn, a woman's paradox,)/ Is but a small thing to the love of one" (172). When Aurora goes on in the very next lines to equate the desire for "the love of one" with physical hunger, Lucy's "J'ai bien faim" (uttered to Paul Emanuel after he has locked her in the attic to learn her lines for the vaudeville) takes on added significance (Bronte 168). Noting that Barrett Browning read Villette and proclaimed it "very powerful," Stone detects a similarity between "Aurora's psychological and spiritual breakdown on the pavement of a Florentine Catholic Church" and Lucy's "confession and breakdown" in a Belgian Catholic Church (EBB 160). Stone also finds similarities in "narrative perspective" in Villette and Aurora Leigh (138) and observes that both narratives are "permeated by repressed desires and conflicts, and fissured by chronological ruptures" and both demonstrate "constant revisions of the past" and "a 'split' between [the] roles [of] actor and narrator" (161).

In discussing the elements which mark Aurora Leigh as a Romantic text, we should not overlook the characteristics of its poet/heroine, of course. I have already discussed Aurora's bardic qualities and Promethean aspirations, but another element marks her as Romantic: her view of and relationship with Nature.

Aurora's intimate relationship with Nature is first

fostered by her father. When Aurora's Italian mother dies, Aurora's father takes her to Nature for healing: "Because unmothered babes, he thought, had need/ Of mother nature more than others" (4). With the portrait of her dead mother presiding inside the quiet house and "God's silence on the outside" (5), Aurora grows up nurtured, not like the young Wordsworth by beauty and fear, but by "grief and love" (6). Father and child live "among the mountains many years" until Aurora is orphaned at the age of thirteen. She is then forced to go to England and lives for years with her maiden aunt, her father's sister, whose coldness and hardness could qualify her for a teaching position in Jane Eyre's Lowood. Aunt Leigh's system of "education" is torturous to Aurora, as is her removal from everyone and everything she has known and loved. Aurora notes that "[c]ertain of your feebleness" would have sickened and/or died in such a situation, but resists this fate (and her aunt's "education") by "a familiar Romantic stratagem" (Rosenblum 329):

I had relations in the Unseen, and drew
The elemental nutriment and heat
From nature, as earth feels the sun at nights,
Or as a babe sucks surely in the dark. . . . (15-
16).

Aurora turns to Nature for sustenance.

Her move to England is a spiritual banishment, not only due to the coldness of her aunt (who hated Aurora's mother

and blamed her for luring Aurora's father away from his home and family) and her aunt's stultifying educational agenda, but because even Nature is different in England. Describing her motherland, Aurora pictures Italy's Nature as sentient, "grand," even sublime: "headlong leaps/ Of waters . . . cry out for joy or fear/ In leaping though the palpitating pines" and "multitudinous mountains. . . / . . . pant from their full deep hearts/ Beneath the influent heavens, . . . waiting for/ Communion and commission" (20). In contrast, England's Nature is "A nature tamed." But it is also a "sweet familiar nature, . . . excellent/ For inner uses" (21). And, gradually, this "nature tamed" heals Aurora and reintroduces her to joy.

Aurora recalls how she used to get up early, just to watch the dawn, how she used to reach through the window to stroke the woodbine, "till at last,/ I came to do it with a sort of love,/ At foolish unaware: whereat I smiled,--/ A melancholy smile, to catch myself/ Smiling for joy" (22). She progresses from such a furtive enjoyment of Nature to a more daring one:

To slip down stairs through all the sleepy house,

. . . and escape

As a soul from the body, out of doors,--

Glide through the shrubberies, drop into the lane,

And wander on the hills an hour or two,

Then back again before the house would stir. (22-

23)

Aurora speaks of her early morning walks as if they were secret meetings with a lover. And, in a way, they are. Aurora's aunt fancies a drawing-room education as the only fit one for a young lady, but Aurora balks at her aunt's "cage-bird life": "born in a cage,/ Accounting that to leap from perch to perch,/ Was act and joy enough for any bird" (10). But Aurora is a "wild bird" (10); she feels the need to be in Nature.

As a child and a young woman, Aurora relates to Nature as if it were a parent (usually a mother) or a lover. As she matures, Nature takes on other roles. On her way back to Italy and troubled in spirit, the adult Aurora sits silent one night and feels a special comfort steal over her: "I could hear my own soul speak,/ And had my friend,--for Nature comes sometimes/ And says, 'I am ambassador for God'" (253). As Aurora comes to see Nature as more divine, she comes to sound more and more Romantic: "Earth's crammed with heaven,/ And every common bush afire with God:/ But only he who sees, takes off his shoes" (265). Like the preceding lines, the following lines are reminiscent of Blake and his insistence that "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite":

If a man could feel,
Not one day, in the artist's ecstasy,

But every day, feast, fast, or working-day,
 The spiritual significance burn through
 The hieroglyphic of material shows,
 Henceforward he would paint the globe with wings,
 And reverence fish and fowl, the bull, the tree,
 And even his very body as a man. . . . (266)

In Book 7, Aurora narrates her spiritual crisis. Tellingly, she associates the loss of an "irrecoverable child-innocence" with the loss of fellowship with Nature. She remembers feeling "fellowship and mateship" with "insect, beast, and bird," "But now the creatures all seemed farther off,/ No longer mine, nor like me. . . / A gulph between us" (273). This "gulph" is bridged only when Aurora is able to establish connection with other human beings (first Marian and her child, then Romney) and to admit and heal her own internal division.

This sense of division within Aurora is presented to us in the opening lines of the poem:

Of writing many books there is no end;
 And I who have written much in prose and verse
 For others' uses, will write now for mine,--
 Will write my story for my better self,
 As when you paint your portrait for a friend,
 Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it
 Long after he has ceased to love you, just
 To hold together what he was and is. (1)

Like Bronte's Lucy, Aurora presents herself to us from the very beginning as a divided self. And, again, this division is not solely the result of a schism created by the autobiographical narrative mode (between the older/wiser self who narrates and the younger self being narrated). Experience has made the older Aurora different from the younger one, but it has also taught her that in the world in which she lives, woman and artist are seen as incompatible subject positions. Thus, Aurora-the-artist chooses to paint her own portrait, to write her own story. And for whom? For herself, her "better self," whom she compares to a friend who may someday cease to love her. Is this "better self" Aurora-the-woman who is now (or will be) alienated from and disapproving of Aurora-the-artist? To assume so is to ignore the next line which tells us why this friend still looks at the portrait of one whom he has ceased to love: "To hold together what he [sic] was and is"--not what he was and no longer is, but what he was and is. Aurora looks back upon her unbounded idealism and her pride as a young poet, and, perhaps, she cringes (given the conclusions she comes to at the ending of the text). But this should not be interpreted as a denial or disinheritance of her former self (or her vocation). On the contrary, it is an attempt to keep that former self alive in the self of today.

Aurora writes her text to "hold together" parts of herself: child and adult, artist and woman (and soon-to-be

wife). Margaret Reynolds claims that in these opening lines Aurora is expressing her interest in "analyzing the construction of her identity" (5). But in this text of potentiality, the question is not "How did I become what I am?" but "What/who am I becoming?" As Aurora writes, the self-construction is still in progress; identity is being represented here as a "dynamically interactive process rather than a freestanding construction" (Tucker 75). When Aurora "holds together" those parts of herself, she will create a self which is more than the sum of its parts, just as her union with Romney will be a "visionary new synthesis" (Gilbert 200). As Marjorie Stone suggests, in writing for a "better self," Aurora is actually calling that better self into existence (EBB 188). In Aurora Leigh, Aurora is involved in the art of "self-making" which Gail Turley Houston identifies as marking the *kunstlerroman* as an essentially Romantic genre. With her narrative, Aurora is writing herself whole.

Aurora Leigh traces the evolution of Aurora as a female Romantic bard and as a woman. As she presents herself to us in her text, Aurora is very much a subject-in-process. Her narrative does not progress chronologically. Aurora often doubles back upon herself and her past, producing the "rewriting and erasure of the self" which Houston identifies with the *kunstlerroman* (213) and the "[na]rratizing [of] its own composition" and "render[ing] elastic the relation of

the writing present to the written past" which Herbert Tucker identifies as a signifier of "the poet's unconventional freedom" (66). Thus, Aurora enmeshes her growth as a poet and a woman with the story of that growth, the construction of the self which writes with the self being written of. She becomes both poet and poem, suggesting that the composition of her text is not just an expression of her self but the means whereby that self is being constructed.

As we have already seen, Aurora considers poetry a high calling. In Book 7, Aurora, by now a professional writer, maintains that "we stand here, we,/ If genuine artists, witnessing for God's/ Complete, consummate, undivided work" (265). But can the artist, if cut off from human intimacy and divided within herself, actually be a "witness" for "God's . . . undivided work"? Aurora comes to understand that she cannot, and it is this understanding which she communicates near the end of the text when she tells Romney, "No perfect artist is developed here/ From any imperfect woman" (341). For Aurora, as a Romantic, perfection equals unity, and revolution/reintegration begins with (and within) the individual.

As Aurora grows as an artist and as a woman, she comes to question certain oppositional paradigms. For example, she comes to question the paradigm that she accepted as truth as a young woman that she would have to choose between

love and art, between life as a woman and life as a "printing woman." In Book 5, feeling isolated and disillusioned, Aurora tells her friend, Lord Howe:

you shall not speak
To a printing woman who has lost her place,
(The sweet safe corner of the household fire
Behind the heads of children) compliments
As if she were a woman. (182-83)

Here Aurora voices the assumption that as a professional woman writer, she is not really a woman at all; she has "lost her place." She then beseeches Lord Howe to speak to her "man to man" (183).

What Aurora comes to realize is that gender lines are drawn, after all, by men and women who usually fail to see the arbitrary, artificial nature of those lines:

--Men define a man,
The creature who stands front-ward to the stars,
The creature who looks inward to himself,
The tool-wright, laughing creature. . . .

But a man--
Note men!--they are but women after all,
As women are but Auroras!--there are men
Born tender, apt to pale at a trodden worm,
Who paint for pastime, in their favourite dream. .
. . (270-71)

And there are women who write, not "for pastime," but for

passion, and by profession. If love and art are not mutually exclusive for men, why must they be for women? This question plagues Aurora, for, as we have already seen, she (though rewarded with fame) is hungry for love, and even art cannot satisfy that hunger. Artistic dedication may evolve (or dissolve) into self-absorption, and dedication to others into the self-sacrifice that leaves one with no self at all. What Aurora must learn is how to reconcile these two (love and art, Aurora-the-woman and Aurora-the-"printing woman")--not how to choose between them.

In Northrop Frye's Foreword to Romanticism Reconsidered, he makes the following comment in relation to Trilling's essay on ideas regarding pleasure in Wordsworth and Keats, but it is relevant to this discussion of Aurora's struggle to negotiate between self-absorption and self-dilution as well.

But the same thing happens to Romanticism that happens to Satan in Paradise Lost: the separation of consciousness from what supports it is exhilarating at first, and then restrictive. The individual becomes the ego, and the ego turns to a kind of perversion of puritanism, seeking the principle of its own being in a pure detachment which rebuffs everything that it might come to depend on or be indebted to. . . . (vii)

That which supports human beings is relationship--to other

human beings, to external reality (both Nature and the world of men and women). This evolution from exhilaration to restriction which Frye identifies is provocative in that we can see it at work in Aurora Leigh. And we can also see self-affirmation transform into self-denial, and self-denial into self-absorption, as Aurora struggles for her balance.

On the morning of her twentieth birthday, Aurora joyfully embraces her vocation, crowning herself a poet "in sport" (39). But her sense that she must suffer for her art and, like Victor Frankenstein in his laboratory, shut herself away from the external world in order to create soon means the end of such "sport." For years, in a third-floor room in London,

Day and night

I worked my rhythmic thought, and furrowed up
Both watch and slumber with long lines of life
Which did not suit their season. The rose fell
From either cheek, my eyes globed luminous
Through orbits of blue shadow, and my pulse
Would shudder along the purple-veined wrist
Like a shot bird. (86)

Ironically, she seems to think self-sacrifice the path to self-construction, and even comes to demonstrate a perverse pride in her self-denial.

When, near the end of Book 4, Aurora and Romney meet again, Romney notices that Aurora looks pale and wasted:

"Aurora, you are changed--are ill?" Aurora's rather condescending response demonstrates her sense of her own superiority as a suffering poet:

"Not so, my cousin,--only not asleep!"
 I answered, smiling gently. "Let it be.
 You scarcely found the poet of Vaucluse
 As drowsy as the shepherds. What is art,
 But life upon the larger scale, the higher,
 When, graduating up in a spiral line
 Of still expanding and ascending gyres,
 It pushes toward the intense significance
 Of all things, hungry for the Infinite?
 Art's life,--and where we live, we suffer and
 toil." (154)

Aurora obviously feels herself quite literally above the masses of "drowsy shepherds." Her response also demonstrates the validity of Gilbert and Gubar's comment about the "dangers of hyperbolic self-aggrandizement" and the pride which Aurora must learn to outgrow (576). Subscribing to the myth of the solitary, suffering artist, Aurora has become self-absorbed. Cut off from human interaction and intimacy, her consciousness has become detached from that which supports it.

Aurora does begin to bridge the gap between her own consciousness and that which supports it when she "adopts" Marian Earle and her child and, taking them with her,

returns to Italy. Marjorie Stone credits Marian Earle--the working-class "fallen woman" who considers herself redeemed by her illegitimate child (the product of a rape)--with Aurora's salvation from egotistical puritanism: "Marian is the necessary angel of earth who redeems Aurora by reminding her of her own humanity, and who leads her towards the revelation of a new order based not on purity but on love, focused not on the afterworld but on this world" (EBB 183-84). Forgetting her own humanity is potentially fatal for Aurora as a Romantic bard, for she cannot speak of, for, or to that which is foreign to her.

Attempting to deny/sacrifice part of herself (supposedly for the good of her art) comes to be self-defeating; internally divided, she cannot bear witness for "God's . . . undivided work" (265). Finally, by the end of Book 7, the division becomes so intense that both woman and artist are disabled:

I did not write, nor read, nor even think,
But sate absorbed amid the quickening glooms,
Most like some passive broken lump of salt
Dropt in by chance to a bowl of oenomei,
To spoil the drink a little, and lose itself,
Dissolving slowly, slowly, until lost. (279-80)

Aurora's diction reveals the gravity of the situation: she, who fought so valiantly for herself and her vocation, is now "absorbed," "dissolving," losing herself.

The only way to hold herself together now is to put herself back together, to reconcile and reintegrate. It is not just marriage that Aurora needs; she has refused more than one marriage proposal, and for good reasons. Romney does not come to Aurora in Italy simply to propose marriage. He brings affirmation of the worth of her work:

But, in this last book,
You showed me something separate from yourself,
Beyond you; and I bore to take it in,
And let it draw me. You have shown me truths,
O June-day friend, that help me now at night,
When June is over! truths not yours, indeed,
But set within my reach by means of you. . .

. (300)

Romney, who has been her harshest critic, now gives her the highest praise she could desire. She has communicated her "essential truth" after all, and to one who scorned both her "truth" and herself as its translator. And Romney brings affirmation of another sort as well. When he admits his blindness (not physical, but metaphorical), his materialistic approach to social reform, his ambition and pride, he serves as a catalyst for Aurora's admission that she has been guilty of similar weaknesses, just in different forms.

What finally restores Aurora's visionary potential, however, is her rejection of the myth of the solitary,

suffering artist and her recognition of the falseness of the oppositional paradigms of love and art, woman and artist, and spirituality and materiality. It seems that Aurora had to come to the point of near dissolution in order to be re-shaped, re-formed, in order to have her vision of an "organically evolving order" (Tucker 72). Aurora Leigh does not end with a marriage, but with the promise of one; not with New Jerusalem already established on earth, but with a vision of it. Aurora, her narrative, and her vision are "organically evolving," not already evolved. The New Jerusalem of the reintegrated subject does not just come; it has to be built. Aurora re-builds herself through her narration. Writing her story for her better self, she "make[s] all new."

In Aurora Leigh, Barrett Browning created not just a visionary work, but a re-visionary one, a work which causes us to re-view our own conceptual categories. It is a Romantic poem; Aurora Leigh is a Romantic subject--both Romantic bard and Romantic heroine. But its form resists neat categorization; it is several things at once: "novel-poem," Romantic epic, *kunstlerroman*. And its message is revolutionary in many ways, not the least of which is its Romantic insistence on the constructive (and re-constructive) power of the human mind. In another instance of form embodying (or re-producing) message, perhaps it is

no accident that Aurora's epic is divided into nine books²--not twenty-four (like Homer's Iliad and Odyssey), not twelve (like Virgil's Aeneid and Milton's Paradise Lost), not even fourteen (like Wordsworth's 1850 Prelude).

Typically, nine months of pregnancy proceed the birth of a healthy child. Is it taking nine books for Aurora to, as I suggested earlier, "write herself whole," nine books to give birth to this "better self"? One of the most significant of this poem's features is its unrelenting dedication to the deconstruction of oppositional paradigms in order to make possible the construction of something--or someone--new. Barrett Browning places several of these oppositional paradigms in front of us: man/woman, realism/idealism, materialism/spirituality, love/art. Her approach is to reconcile them, to make them not opposites but complements. Maintaining a radically egalitarian vision, she then goes to great pains to demonstrate that while each will retain its individual "identity," a revolutionary new entity will be formed.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning signals her investment in the visionary, revolutionary elements of Romanticism through the transformative self-making of a female Romantic poet who is both the heroine and the writer of her own story. Self-authored and self-authorized as woman-writer, Aurora is

²I am indebted to Dr. Nancy Goslee for her suggestion of the parallel between nine months of pregnancy and Aurora's nine-book epic.

perpetually narratively in the process of becoming. At the conclusion of this text, we stand at the gates of the New Jerusalem, listening to the voice of the bard--poised on the brink of radical possibility.

CONCLUSION

I began the writing of this dissertation with the belief/assumption that there is a voice of female Romantic subjectivity distinct from, and (basically) oppositional to, a voice of male Romantic subjectivity. Through the process of writing this dissertation, however, I have come to suspect my initial belief/assumption of being overly simplistic, even reductive.

There is not a voice of female Romantic subjectivity, anymore than there is (despite the commonalities that I still maintain exist among Romantic writers--male and female) a voice of male Romantic subjectivity. I have come to share the concern of Nina Auerbach who, in the introduction to a collection of her own thematically-organized essays on Romanticism and gender, says, "I do not search for a common female experience that makes sense of all women and of the books they write. I want to stay true to differences, to perceived dangers and real ones, to all anomalies" (xxiii-xxiv). Commonalities do not necessitate a common experience for women (or men). I have tried to stay sensitive to this fact, to stay true to differences; I have, no doubt, succeeded more fully in some parts of this work than in others.

Charlotte Smith, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Bronte, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning do not share exactly the same vision--of themselves as women and artists, or of what is

possible/desirable in subjectivity or art--any more than they shared exactly the same lived experience. They did, however, confront similar obstacles as women and artists, and, as I have attempted to show, these obstacles helped to determine their strategies as authors (the forms they chose, and the symbols; their approaches to publication; their rhetorical stances/methods of self-presentation and authorization). There is a strategy that runs through all four of these works, however; I have called it "Romantic self-making" on more than one occasion. Smith, Shelley, Bronte, and Barrett Browning chose narrative as the vehicle for and the site of self-construction.

In the opening comments of his essay, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," M.H. Abrams observes, "Romanticism is no one thing" (29; my emphasis). Neither is it, I would add, simply two things. In Romanticism and Gender, Anne Mellor argues that there are two distinct Romanticisms: a masculine Romanticism (which she associates with the Wordsworthian egotistical sublime), characterized by "oppositional construction of subjectivity" and "possessive interaction"; and a feminine Romanticism based on community, the domestic, and "cooperative interaction" (1-11). She defends herself against charges of binary thinking and essentialism by arguing that

the relationship between "masculine" and feminine"
Romanticism is finally not one of structural

opposition but rather of intersection along a fluid continuum. Any writer, male or female, could occupy the "masculine" or the "feminine" ideological or subject position. . . . (4)

Despite my initial attraction to Mellor's argument (it is, in part, through her work that I "discovered" and came to appreciate some of the many Romantic women writers that I had never read before), I am troubled by something here. . . . Despite her insistence that this model is neither binary nor essentialist, I wonder: why is it the "'feminine' ideological or subject position" which is based on "the domestic"? Is this not separate-spheres ideology reincarnated in a more theoretically sophisticated form? And I consider the works I discuss in this dissertation. I see very little emphasis on "the domestic" in Charlotte Smith's angst-ridden sonnets. What little emphasis there is on it in Frankenstein leads me to suspect (as I argue in Chapter 2) that Mary Shelley had her own suspicions that "the domestic" may not be the site of positive nurturance it is stereotypically thought to be by some. When "the domestic" is represented in Villette and Aurora Leigh, furthermore, it is represented as peripheral to the central concerns of the text/character. Lucy may be comfortable in her little house/school and Aurora may be destined for wifehood, but neither Bronte nor Barrett Browning intimately links domesticity with either character's self-authorization

(as woman or writer). Lucy is too busy running her school and Aurora too busy heralding (and building) the New Jerusalem to focus much attention or energy on the laundry or the china.

It is dangerous (and unfair) to ignore the differences gender makes to the study of Romanticism. It is also dangerous, I think, to argue for two Romanticisms based solely on gender. Perhaps the most challenging (and Romantic) task lies ahead for us as teachers and scholars of Romanticism: to see the differences and the similarities at the same time; to exert that "double vision" which Aurora insists poets should have:

To see near things as comprehensibly
As if afar they took their point of sight,
And distant things, as intimately deep. . . (163);

to maintain a "fearful symmetry."

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VITA

Peggy Dunn's love of language and story was nurtured by parents who wanted for their daughter the kind of formal education which the exigencies of life had seemed to deny them. As an undergraduate, unsure of the job prospects for an English major, she combined her study of literature with training in business and earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree (with English as a second major) in 1986. After two years of working in the business world, she returned to school to pursue the Master of Arts in English. Holding an assistantship, she tutored students and had her first experiences as a college-level English teacher. These experiences, combined with the enthusiasm she still felt for the study of literature, convinced her that in college-level teaching she had found her vocation. After teaching full-time for a year, she came to the University of Tennessee, where she taught part-time as a Teaching Associate while pursuing a Ph.D. in English. The doctoral degree was awarded in August of 1997. Immediately afterward, she began work as a full-time Instructor in the Department of English at the University of Tennessee, teaching freshman English and sophomore-level literature courses.