SEEING AS KNOWING: NEWTON’S OPTICKS AND THE
PERCEPTION OF THE FEMALE EDUCATOR IN CHARLOTTE
BRONTË’S NOVELS

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A dissertation submitted to the Department of English Literature and Culture,
School of English, Faculty of Philosophy
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In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Thessaloniki
2014
Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore aspects of Newton’s influence on Charlotte Brontë’s four novels and the way this influence informs issues of epistemology, narratology and feminism as well as provides a model of reading her novels. Newton’s optical theories can be detected in Brontë’s work in a number of instances: first, in the handling of light and colours in her poetry and prose; second, in the construction of her narratives which are like prisms and spectrums full of converging and diverging voices and perspectives; and third, in the representation of the mind both as a prism and as a camera obscura. The representation of the mind as a prism and as a camera obscura is part of Brontë’s experimentation with the concept of female epistemological agency. In her novels, the female educator emerges as an exemplary image of female epistemological agent, who, thanks to her profession, is drawn away from a marginal position, experiments with different viewing positions and establishes a dialogic relation with her social environment. As a result, the female educator constructs an epistemological discourse which prioritizes the female mind and mental qualities, foregrounds alternative and feminine ways of knowing, like intuition, and helps the female subject express herself in narrative spectrums full of both realistic accounts and narratives of fantasy. This way, Newtonian discourses of reason and objectivity are endorsed by Brontë but at the same time they are undermined by discourses of subjective vision and fantasy. The perception and the epistemic viewpoint of the female educator are tested against the epistemic viewpoints of other women in the novels. In the end, the female educator is foregrounded as an empowered “heterogeneous” woman, whose mental power and originality of thought make her unique, as she progresses from ignorance to
knowledge and from obscurity and darkness to light, constructing ‘a knowledge of her own.’
Acknowledgements

Working on my thesis has been an extremely challenging and rewarding experience and I would like to thank several people for their support and contribution into this research project.

First and foremost, words can not express my gratitude for my supervisor Dr. Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou. It was her who sparked my interest in Newton and his *Opticks* in the first place, encouraging me to embark on an extremely stimulating and rewarding intellectual journey. In times of crisis, she’s always reminded me that we should not be afraid of the ‘open sea’ in front of us but, instead, we should be brave and swim—a piece of advice that has proved precious not only in this academic endeavour but also as a real-life skill. Her intelligent and insightful remarks as well as our discussions initiated me into new areas of study, broadened my thinking and served as a source of constant inspiration. It is her more than generous help, patience, encouragement and unfailing support as well as her example of hard work, commitment and high academic standards that fueled my efforts and enthusiasm to complete this thesis.

In addition, I would like to wholeheartedly thank Dr. Dimitra Kogidou for her warm, positive, encouraging and always supportive attitude as well as her thoughtful comments and prompt response whenever I needed her help as a member of my advising committee. Furthermore, I would like to thank deeply Dr. Effie Yiannopoulou, my other co-advisor, for her gentleness and encouragement as well as her meticulous, illuminating and insightful comments on the final drafts of my thesis.

I am also greatly indebted to Dr. Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, a professor and Brontë expert I deeply respect and admire since my undergraduate years, for her
extremely helpful feedback and commentary on earlier stages of my research and especially on my chapter on Jane Eyre.

Furthermore, I am very grateful to Dr. Eleni Constantinidou for her encouragement and support at a crucial point in the very beginning of my PhD. In addition, I would like to thank deeply the Greek State Scholarships Foundation (I.K.Y.) for granting me a scholarship and the Administration of Secondary Education, Ioannina, for granting me a leave to conduct part of my research.

In a more personal note, I would like thank my parents: my father, Costas, for always being by my side and for setting a real life model of hard work and determination, and my mother, Vaso, for her love, affection and example of lifelong love of learning. In addition, I would like to thank my brother Dimitris and his little expectant family for his support and practical help. I am greatly indebted to my parents-in-law, Apostolis and Voula, for their sincere care, continuous encouragement and, mostly, their invaluable practical help with my children whenever I needed their helping hand. My thanks are also due to my brothers-in-law, Costas and Dimitris, and their lovely families for their interest in my project. And of course, I would like to thank my friends, and especially my childhood friend Katerina for her help and support.

This thesis is dedicated to my two precious little sons, Apostolis and Constantinos, with all my love, which cannot be caged into words, and the wish that they pursue their own dreams in life. It is also dedicated to my beloved husband, Yiorgos, whose strength, optimism and determination have always been a source of inspiration and strength for me. Without his patience, love, encouragement and support this thesis would never have been brought to completion.
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Abbreviations and Short Titles

FID  Free Indirect Discourse
Mlle  Mademoiselle
M  Monsieur
M Beck  Madame Beck
Chapter One
Introduction—Theoretical Framework—Newton's *Opticks* and Charlotte Brontë: The Heterogeneity of Light as a Metaphor for the Heterogeneity of Voices and Perspectives in Narrative

Charlotte Brontë’s novels echo aspects of Newton’s influence on eighteenth-century imagination and literary production. This is evident in her treatment of colours and light, in her use of optical terminology, mostly though in the representation of the mind and in narratological terms.

The representation of the mind in her novels draws on the image of the prism, as well as the image of a bipartite entity\(^1\) which comprises both the agent of perception and the site of perception, a site which refers to the image of the camera obscura. Within the seeming enclosure of the mental camera obscura, various discourses emerge complicating bipoles of masculine/feminine, reason/imagination, subjective/objective vision in a spectrum of prismatic colours. These prismatic colours are reflected on a prismatic narrative which is defined by polyvocality and multiperspectivity. The many colours of the spectrum are analogous to a text which is full of converging and diverging perspectives, voices and discourses, embedded narratives of fantasy leading to an experimental narrative which is an amalgam of “commonplace realism” and “unusual events and emotional intensity, both heightened by acute, vivid imagery” as Alexander and Smith describe it (261). Thus, an

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\(^1\) The image of the mind as a bipartite entity, comprising both the site and the agent of perception, was developed by William Walker in his book *Locke, Literary Criticism and Philosophy* (1994), as one of the dominant metaphors for the mind in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Locke was one of the philosophers who shaped the philosophical ramifications of Newton’s work and this analogy for the mind is in many instances valid in Charlotte Brontë’s novels as I would like to argue in later sections of my thesis.
experimental proto-feminist narratology is developed which is exemplified in aspects like dialogism and embedded narratives of fantasy and superstition.

This prismatic narrative constructs an epistemological discourse within the realm of the camera obscura, which shapes a powerful epistemological agent in the figure of the female educator, either the governess or the schoolteacher. On the site of her mental space, the female educator develops an alternative epistemology which defies rationality and reason, and explores feminine ways of knowing like subjective vision, fantasy, imagination and instinct, tracing the progress of the heroine from obscurity/ignorance to light/enlightenment/knowledge. In other words, Newton’s discourse of objectivity, reason and rationality is endorsed and at the same time undermined by discourses of imagination, fantasy, emotion and instinct in Charlotte Brontë’s novels. This is achieved through a dialogue that the female educator sets up with her social context, something which is made feasible by the ambiguous social position of her profession. In the spectrum of her narrative, the female educator juxtaposes her mental power and epistemic viewpoint with other women’s, in an attempt to reappropriate them, almost colonize them, struggling to define what she is by exploring what she is not, shaping the figure of the “heterogeneous” (JE 15) woman.

In the introduction to my thesis, I present an overview of Newton’s theories of light and colour as developed in his *Opticks* (1704), theories which construct a model which is analogous to the heterogeneity and multiperspectivity of a narrative. To support my argument, I draw on aspects of classical narratology and Bakhtin’s ideas of the heterogeneity of discourse which can expand the multidimensionality and multivoicedness of a literary text. The way that this multiperspectivity of the literary text is explored in parts of feminist thinking as well as aspects of feminist
epistemology are of particular interest to my study. This is so, because the main
class character of Brontë’s novels, whose consciousness we access, is the female educator,
a professional who handles the knowledge economy of her times as shown in
Charlotte Brontë’s narratives.

1. Newton’s Opticks

Newton's scientific achievements are regarded as the peak of the Scientific Revolution
that began in the late sixteenth century and resulted in rapid changes in the knowledge
of nature and the way that people studied natural phenomena leading to what we
consider today as modern science (Cohen and Westfall xi). In his Opticks (1704), he
established his theory about the heterogeneity of sunlight and he reformulated our
understanding of the nature of colours (Cohen and Westfall xi).

In 1666, in a notebook under the title “Of Colours,” Newton presented the
core of his theories in Opticks which was published later, in 1704 (Cohen and
Westfall 168). He talked about issues like the heterogeneity of light, the different
refrangibility of the different rays, the capacity of individual rays to excite unique
sensations of colour, and hence the production of phenomena of colours, not by the
modification of homogeneous light, but by the analysis or separation of the
heterogeneous mixture into its component parts (Cohen and Westfall 168).

Newton first presented his theory of light and colour in 1672 in a letter to the
Royal Society, which was later published under the title “New Theory about Light
and Colours.” In this letter Newton described his classic experiment in which a beam
of sunlight, refracted by a prism, displayed an elongated spectrum of colours, the
colours of which ranged from red to violet (Ribe 316). His main conclusion was that
light is heterogeneous and not homogenous as people thought until then (Ribe 316) and that “light consists of rays which are differently refractable” (Newton, Letter 4):

Colours are basic properties of light and these properties are different in different rays. Some rays are disposed to exhibit a red colour and no other; some a yellow colour and no other …. A given colour always has the degree of refractability and a given degree of refractability always associates with the same colour. (Newton, Letter 5)

Newton's great reputation among scientists, philosophers, economists, political theorists, social thinkers, and even poets derived later, in 1704, from his *Opticks* which was written in a simple English style and which dealt with a fascinating subject that is light and colours, which captured people’s imagination (Cohen and Westfall xiv).

As Bernard Cohen explains, in his *Opticks*, Newton developed the idea that light is a mixture of light of all colours or, in his own words, of colour-producing rays (19). The refraction, that is the bending of light or the changing of the direction of light by means of the prism, is of a different amount for each of the colours in the mixture of the white sunlight; each colour has its own degree of bending or refraction as it goes from air into glass (B. Cohen 19). So, the prism produces the spectrum by separating the component colours that are mixed in sunlight, and this separation becomes feasible because of the different degree of refrangibility for each of the colour-producing rays (B. Cohen 20).²

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² Also Newton proved the validity of this theory with the following “experimentum crucis” (crucial experiment):
In this “experimentum crucis,” he let a spectrum be formed. Then he took a board with a hole (or aperture) cut in it so that he could select from the spectrum a beam of light of only one color, say green or orange. He then passed this single-colored light through a second prism in order to see what would happen. If it was the action of the prism that produced the colors in the spectrum, then the second prism would cause a spectrum to be formed from the green light. But if the prism merely bent the light, as he had theorized, then the green light would be bent (refracted) but would...
So, light is heterogeneous rather than homogeneous (Cohen and Westfall 168). There is a different degree of ability to refract for different rays or, in other words, sunlight consists of rays of unequal refrangibility. In his lectures, Newton described experiments using several prisms to show that light rays were differently refrangible and that differently refrangible rays display different colours (Schaffer, *Glass Works* 205). His fundamental experiment to prove his claim was passing light through a prism and projecting its image, or spectrum as it is called, onto a screen. If rays were equally refrangible, the spectrum should have been circular. Instead it was oblong, proving thus that different rays have different degrees of refrangibility (Shapiro 192).

In addition, individual rays have the capacity to excite unique sensations of colour (Cohen and Westfall 168). As Shapiro explains, Newton held that light rays are not coloured but rather cause *sensations of different colours* depending on their physical constitution (194). For the sake of convenience, though, he used red or blue rays instead of red-making rays in the diction of his book (Shapiro 194). So, there is an one–to-one correspondence between refrangibility and colour (Shapiro 194) and Newton proved experimentally that each ray had a specific refrangibility and produced a specific colour (Schaffer, *Glass Works* 203).

Moreover, colours are not produced by the modification of homogeneous light inside the prism. They are produced by the analysis or separation by means of a prism of the heterogeneous mixture of light into its component parts (Cohen and Westfall remain pure green. When Newton performed this experiment, he found that the green light was bent by the second prism and that the light did indeed stay pure green. He tried the same experiment for orange and blue, for each of the colors. In every case the single-colored (monochromatic) light was bent (refracted) by the second prism, but its color was unaltered. (B. Cohen 20)

In this way, Newton proved that the action of the prism is merely to refract (bend) the light, that the bending is different for each of the colours, and that sunlight is a mixture of light of all colours (B. Cohen 20).
Newton’s experiments with prisms showed that it is refraction\(^3\) which can analyse sunlight into its component rays.

Apart from his discoveries regarding light, Newton developed in his *Opticks* the “optimal way in which the phenomena of nature can be explored by science” (B. Cohen 22). His optical discoveries provided an excellent example of experimental inquiry which exemplified a new way of studying the phenomena of nature (B. Cohen 22; see also Cohen and Westfall 112). As a result Newton, together with other pioneers in this field, contributed to the recognition of experimental inquiry as the “key to a great scientific revolution” (B. Cohen 22). His methodology of conducting scientific experiments illustrated a basic principle of the Scientific Revolution, namely that knowledge should be based upon the senses, that is, on what any man or woman can see or hear or touch or smell, as well as on what can be learnt by experiment and critical observation (B. Cohen 22). In this framework, science can profit and develop only by “direct interrogation” of natural phenomena and not by the statements of authorities, which are endorsed without any questioning (B. Cohen 22).

So, it is the knowledge and use of the correct methodology in experimentation which underscores the importance of man’s mind and reason, and constitutes the only way to reach sound knowledge of nature and natural phenomena (B. Cohen 22). As a result, eighteenth-century experimentalists received Newton’s *Opticks* as a model of “experimental efficiency and productivity” (Sepper 262). Dennis Sepper agrees with Cohen that the experimentalists of that era aspired to reach a level where their experiments would speak for themselves and as a result their theories would look almost self-evident (262).

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\(^3\) According to Longman Dictionary, *to refract* means to make light *change direction* when passing through glass or water. This means that the refraction of a ray of light is in fact a deviation, an aberration from its original direction.
Opticks was better known to laymen because it was written in English, not in Latin like Principia, and it was more comprehensible and interesting, particularly to many poets who were interested in colour and light since they wanted to use them in their poetry (Nicolson, Newton Demands the Muse 4). When Newton published his Opticks in 1704, he employed a “straightforward expository style” and addressed not only the natural philosophers but also the “general English reader” (Epstein and Greenberg 116). He deliberately made his Opticks accessible to the nonscientist, in order to make his new discoveries known and as a result Opticks was one of the first modern scientific works that managed to engage a wide audience (Epstein and Greenberg 116).

Therefore, such an innovative and influential work as the Opticks could not be left without poetic response and interest. As Marjorie Hope Nicolson explains in her book Newton Demands the Muse (1946), in which she studied Newton’s influence on eighteenth-century poetry, the widespread interest in the Opticks, began immediately

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4 Critics and physicists were more concerned with Principia which was the earlier book by Newton where he explained gravity, the three laws of motion, the motion of comets, planets and other issues and which was a mathematical book, very difficult to follow (Nicolson, Newton Demands the Muse 4).

5 However, William Powel Jones in his article “Newton Further Demands the Muse” makes the point that The Principia was more influential than the Opticks, since as he explains, when eighteenth-century poets talked about Newton’s theories, they were usually thinking of the orderly universe, the orderliness of planets, stars, comets, described in the Principia rather than the beauty of light and colours in Opticks (287, 306).

6 In her pioneer study of Newton’s influence on eighteenth-century imagination and poetry, Nicolson holds that the influence of his Opticks is especially evident in the handling of light and colours in eighteenth-century poetry. In much of the poetry of this era, direct references to Newton’s name are frequent, especially after his death, but mostly poems abound in references to all hues and tints of colours, light, rainbows as well as the refraction of light. Nicolson divides the poets in three categories: the “descriptive” poets who focused on colours and light and entered into their poetry the “symbolism of the spectrum” to describe nature and beauty; the “scientific poets” who showed keen interest in the science of colour as developed in the Opticks, seemed to understand it quite well and incorporated patterns of reflection of light or optical terminology like “refraction,” “ray,” “prism” in their poetry; and the “metaphysical poets” who attempted to explore the metaphysical ramifications of the Opticks. The questions which were explored in their poetry related mostly to the relationship between science and metaphysics, Reason and Fancy, on whether science can gain superiority over religion, or on whether beauty is inherent in nature and external world, or it is a construction in the mind of the viewer and his subjective vision.
after Newton’s death in 1727 and it reached the point of his deification (11). An example of such an attitude towards Newton was Alexander Pope’s “Epitaph Intended for Sir Isaac Newton”:

Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid at night;

God sail, “Let Newton be!” and all was light. (qtd in Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 37)

Moreover, Nicolson singles out James Thomson, who wrote a well-known poem “To the memory of Sir Isaac Newton” (1727), as particularly influential on other poets of his time as far as their treatment of Newton is concerned. An excerpt of Thomson’s eulogy on Newton and his bright mind reads as follows:

Even Light itself, which everything displays,
Shone undiscovered, till his brighter mind,
Untwisted all the shining robe of day;
And, from the whitening undistinguished blaze,
Collecting every ray into his kind,
To the charmed eye educed the gorgeous train,
Of parent colours. (Thomson ll 96-102 qtd in Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 12)

Poets were inspired by Thomson in writing poems which exemplified interest in optics, made references to light, colours, and the rainbow showing thus a new kind of beauty which can be found in the natural world (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 12-13). In addition, in the poetry of the eighteenth century we find direct references to Newton’s name; usually Newton offered a starting point for poets who later turned their interest to images and motifs of sunlight in their poetry (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 38-39). Poets of the era were assisted in their understanding and
exploration of light and colour by a new poetical model which was established mainly by Thomson⁷ as well as by the “popular expositions,” books and translations, which were particularly designed in order to simplify Newton’s theories for the laymen (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 15, 17).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, allusions to the theories of colour and light were more frequent in poetry (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 17).

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⁷ According to Nicolson, Thomson’s poem *The Seasons*, is the most representative and the most influential poem which exemplifies Newtonian implications and *Opticks*’ influence on the poetry of the era. In the part of the poem which is entitled “Summer” Thomson wrote:

The unfruitful rock itself, impregnated by thee,
In dark retirement forms the lucid stone.
The lively diamond drinks thy purest rays,
Collected light compact…
At thee the ruby lights its deepening glow,
And with a waving radiance inward flames.
From thee the sapphire, solid ether, takes
Its hue cerulean; and of evening tinct,
The purple-streaming amethyst is thine.
With thy own smile the yellow topaz burns;
Nor deeper verdure dyes the robe of Spring,
When first she gives it to the southern gale.
Than the green emerald shows. But, all combined,
Thick through the whitening opal play thy beams;
Or, flying from its surface, form
A trembling variance of revolving hues
As the site varies in the gazer’s hand. (Thomson *The Seasons*, Summer ll 140-159)

Nicolson holds that this part exemplifies Newtonian influence, not only in the rich description of various colours and tints (the red, yellow, green, blue, violet of the spectrum are mentioned) but most of all, in the fact that the resolution of light into colours is followed by the return of colours back into light (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 27-28). The image that the poem describes reminds us of Newton’s experiment in *Opticks*, Book I, part II, Proposition V: “By the Quickness of the Successions, the Impressions of the several Colours are confounded in the Sensorium, and out of that Confusion ariseth a mix’d Sensation [of whiteness]” (*Opticks* 141; also qtd in Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 28). In the end, all the colours are merging together in the “whitening opal” thus returning to the white light from which they initially derived (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 29).

Furthermore, the following lines from Thomson’s “To the Memory of Newton” are full of the vibrant colours of the spectrum, the natural beauty and the various hues of the “refracted light”:

First, the flaming red
Sprung vivid forth; the tawny orange next;
And next delicious yellow; by whose side
Fell the kind beams of all-refreshing green.
Then the pure blue, that swells autumnal skies,
Ethereal played; and then, of sadder hue;
Emerged the deepened indigo, as when
The heavy–skirted evening droops with frost;
While the last gleamings of refracted light
Died in the fainting violet away. (“To the Memory of Newton” ll 102-111 qtd in Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 26)
Newton inspired poets to show interest again in light but in a different sense since a new poetic attitude emerged: although light was glorious, it was more immediately and obviously beautiful when it was refracted into colours (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 23). So, poets discovered new beauty in familiar aspects of nature, like in individual colours seen through the prism, in the rainbow, in the sunrise or the sunset, in the succession of colours through the day (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 25). In addition, poets began to describe colours in connection with the various tints and colours of gems (Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse* 26).

Charlotte Brontë lived and worked in the first half of the nineteenth century, at a time of transition from the Romantic to the Victorian era. The poetry of the eighteenth century formed the body of her reading, since she was particularly familiar with eighteenth–century poetry, especially Romantic and pre-Romantic poets like Thomas Campbell, James Thomson, Edward Young, William Wordsworth and others (Alexander and Smith 54). So, it is interesting to see how her work relates to the eighteenth-century poetic response to Newton’s *Opticks*.

2. *Opticks* and Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë was familiar with the optical devices and terminology of her time, as scholars like Heather Glen have already shown. What I would like to argue is that she was influenced by Newton in the treatment of light and colour in her poetry, which also informed her treatment of light and colour in descriptive parts, usually of nature, in her prose writing.

The influence of *Opticks* on Charlotte Brontë’s work is refracted, indirect, since she seems to follow the tradition of eighteenth-century poetic response to
Newton’s *Opticks*. As Nicolson explains in many poems of the eighteenth century which were inspired by Newton’s *Opticks*, colour was associated with beauty and light with sublimity (*Newton Demands the Muse* 40), a distinction which Nicolson attributes mainly to Thomson and his handling of light and colour (*Newton Demands the Muse* 110). She also traces a link between “Newton’s light” and the sublime in Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (*Newton Demands the Muse* 123-126). Charlotte Brontë actually assimilates this sublimity when she refers to Isaac Newton, and she does so by expressing her admiration for his “almost superhuman mind” in an extract that constructs him as a sublime figure, an immortal deity:

I wonder … whether the spirit of the mighty Newton roams in crowned majesty over the glorious plains of the centre of light and life, or whether his disembodied soul soars as far as above its sphere as did its sublime and almost superhuman mind above those of the common race of mortals. (Brontë, *Early Writings* 1: 132)

This reference to Newton proves that not only was Charlotte Brontë familiar with Newton’s work, but she was well aware of his worth as man of an exceptional mind, mental potential and worth. The tone of this excerpt echoes her admiration for Newton and constructs an almost idolized image of him as a sublime spirit surrounded by light, almost a deity. What is very interesting is that her description of Newton as a sublime figure wandering in the skies echoes a poetic pattern which was set by John Hughes in 1717 and was later imitated by a number of poets as Nicolson holds:

Hughes seems to have set a pattern for a number of later poets in a passage in which the soul of Newton, “the great Columbus of the skies,” is imagined on
daily visits to the stars and planets, “in search of knowledge for Mankind below.” (Nicolson, *Eighteenth-Century Imagination* 393)

Thus, Brontë’s reference to Newton reflects this classic poetic pattern of eighteenth-century poetry dedicated to Newton, where the soul of Newton roams in heaven registering his majesty and mental superiority over the rest of “mortal people.” Besides, it belongs to the tradition of his poetic deification which continued until the first half of the nineteenth century. As Richard Yeo explains, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, Newton’s reputation as the archetypal example of scientific genius with uncommon intellectual capacities and intact morality was valid. Only by the middle of the nineteenth century did Newton emerge as a more complex figure of genius, who was not simply bestowed with a divine gift from God, but he was closer to a more historically valid idea of genius as informed by an exceptional personality (Yeo 278, 279).8

I would like to argue that Charlotte Brontë’s poetry9 and descriptive parts of her novels reflect a treatment of sunlight and colours which was initially constructed in the poetry of the eighteenth-century and incorporated aspects of Newton’s influence. As Alexander and Smith argue, Charlotte Brontë was fascinated by light, and “its variations on brilliance, splendour, glory, sparkle, glow, or glitter” (384).10 Indeed, in her work, colours of various tints and hues are used to describe nature and

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8 Rebecca Higgit contends that it was earlier, that is, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, that the image of the scientific genius was viewed from a Romantic perspective which might involve dissoluteness, drunkenness and even madness (8). By the 1830s biographers of Newton discovered or rediscovered a range of sources, and started to examine them more fully and systematically adding thus new insights on Newton, which created a more human image of his (Higgit 11).

9 Charlotte Brontë’s poetry traces its roots in her juvenilia as Angela Leighton explains (53). So, chronologically her poetry is anterior to her novel writing.

10 However, Alexander and Smith do not attribute Brontë’s interest in light, colour and their variations to Newton’s influence.
its beauty, and usually invoke feelings of bliss to their viewer. Such an attitude towards colour is exemplified in her poem “The Wood”:

The Wood

… But the white violets, growing here,

Are sweeter than I have seen,

And ne’er did dew so pure and clear

Distil on forest mosses green,

As now, called forth by summer heat,

Perfumes our cool and fresh retreat—

These fragrant limes between. …

That sunset! Look beneath the boughs,

Over the copse—beyond the hills;

How soft, yet deep and warm, it glows,

And heaven with rich *suffusion* fills;

With hues where still the opal’s tint,

Its gleam of prisoned fire, is blent,

Where flame through azure thrills! … (Charlotte Brontë in Benson 27-28, my italics)

In this descriptive poem, the viewer’s sight is captivated by the beautiful colours of the sunset, their merging and their opalescence and “suffusion” against the sky referring thus to the phenomenon of the suffusion of light. So, Charlotte Brontë shows intense interest in colour and light, the merging of tints especially when she describes nature. For example, light which is “dim, scattered and scant” and which creates a suffusion-like effect in the poem “The Wounded Stag” refers to natural beauty:

The Wounded Stag
.... Such light as pierced the crowded boughs—

Light scattered, scant, and dim—

Passed through the fern that formed his couch,

And centred full on him. ... (Charlotte Brontë qtd in Benson 6).

She describes the beauty of nature as well as light and colours in ways which remind the reader of Thomson’s poetry with which she was familiar and the influence of which is pinpointed by Stevie Davies, as the influence of “James Thomson’s eighteenth-century Miltonics” (83) on Charlotte Brontë as he characteristically says.

The treatment of light and colour which is initially exemplified in her poetry is also assimilated in her prose writing especially in the parts in which she describes the tints, hues, colous and light of nature. For example, in The Professor, Brontë describes a particularly Newtonian theme, a rainbow, in an exceptionally lyric and poetic way which focuses on especially fine inflections of colours of the spectrum:

Already the pavement was drying; a balmy and fresh breeze stirred the air, purified by lightning; I felt the West behind me, where spread a sky like opal; azure immingled with crimson: the enlarged sun, glorious in Tyrian tints,

11 Nicolson claims that eighteenth-century poetry’s fascination with light has been attributed traditionally to Milton’s influence and she suggests in her book that Newton’s influence should also be added to this Miltonic influence. As she says: to understand the full radiance of the light which shines in so much eighteenth-century poetry, we must add to the influence of Milton that of Newton. When we study colour and light in detail, we shall find not only new observation, new technique, a groping for a new vocabulary, but also a growing interest in light and colour in connection with the “Sublime” and the “Beautiful” which came to a climax in Burke’s Enquiry. (Nicolson, Newton Demands the Muse 4)

12 Nicolson explains that eighteenth-century poets associated the prism and its colours with “Newton’s rainbow” and “the rainbow in English literature became and remained Newton’s” (Eighteenth-Century Imagination 395). Also, the rainbow was later interestingly associated with a scepticism against science since Newton was “accused” by Keats for destroying all the poetry of the rainbow, by “reducing it to its prismatic colours” (Nicolson, Newton Demands the Muse 1; Wright 191). So, as Nicolson explains, the poetic attitude to Newton’s rainbow was ambivalent since on the one hand, eighteenth-century poets associated with its prismatic colours a new beauty discovered in it, and on the other hand, Keats and other poets like William Blake at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century started to voice what she calls “the poetic damnation of Newton” (Newton Demands the Muse 4, 5).
dipped his brim already; stepping, as I was, eastward, I faced a vast bank of clouds, but also I had before me the arch of an evening rainbow; a perfect rainbow—high, wide, vivid. I looked long; my eye drank in the scene, and I suppose my brain must have absorbed it; for that night, after lying awake in pleasant fever a long time, watching the silent sheet-lightning, which still played among the retreating clouds, and flashed silvery over the stars, I at last fell asleep; and then in a dream were reproduced the setting sun, the bank of clouds, the mighty rainbow. (P 132)

The image of the actual rainbow merges with an imaginary rainbow which appears in Crimsworth’s dreams, as a symbol of hope. Again the description is poetic and the landscape abounds in vivid colours, where the optical image of diffusion is employed:

I stood, methought, on a terrace; I leaned over a parapeted wall; there was space below me, depth I could not fathom, but hearing an endless dash of waves, I believed it to be the sea; sea spread to the horizon; sea of changeful green and intense blue: all was soft in the distance; all vapour-veiled. A spark of gold glistened on the line between water and air, floated up, approached, enlarged, changed; the object hung midway between heaven and earth, under the arch of the rainbow; the soft but dusk clouds *diffused* behind. It hovered as on wings; pearly, fleecy, gleaming air streamed like raiment round it; light, tinted with carnation, coloured what seemed face and limbs; A large star shone with still lustre on an angel's forehead; an upraised arm and hand, glancing like a ray, pointed to the bow overhead, and a voice in my heart whispered,

"Hope smiles on Effort!" (P 132-133, my italics)
Moreover, in the following extract from *Shirley* the white winter landscape is described in a way which reflects imagery and vocabulary similar to the ones used in Thomson’s poetry. We read in Charlotte Brontë’s text:

> At length the latter autumn passed; its fogs, its rains withdrew from England their mourning and their tears; its winds swept on to sigh over lands far away. Behind November came deep winter—clearness, stillness, frost accompanying.

> A calm day had settled into a crystalline evening. The world wore a North Pole colouring; all its lights and tints looked like the *reflets* of white, or violet, or pale green gems. The hills wore a lilac blue; the setting sun had purple in its red; the sky was ice, all silvered azure; when the stars rose, they were of white crystal, not gold; gray, or cerulean, or faint emerald hues—cool, pure, and transparent—tinged the mass of the landscape.

> * Find me an English word as good, reader, and I will gladly dispense with the French word. “Reflections” won't do.\(^{13}\)

> What is this by itself in a wood no longer green, no longer even russet, a wood neutral tint—this dark blue moving object? Why, it is a schoolboy—a Briarfield grammar-school boy—who has left his companions, now trudging home by the highroad, and is seeking a certain tree, with a certain mossy mound at its root, convenient as a seat. (S 566-567)

As is evident in the above excerpt, Charlotte Brontë was fascinated by light and colours, and she focused mainly on her own response to them, and her own perspective as a viewer (of light and colours) and not so much on the laws or the

\(^{13}\) This sentence appears only in the Project Gutenberg edition of the novel, and not in the Oxford edition I use in the rest of my thesis.
physics of light. In this case, she appropriates the term “reflection” and its French equivalent “reflets” in order to pinpoint the insufficiency of scientific terms to render the fine hues of nature. Her handling of colours and light in this extract echoes her poetry, so Brontë incorporates in her prose writing poetic descriptions of colours and light which reflect the eighteenth-century tradition of Newtonian influence on poetry.

Moreover, Charlotte Brontë in her description of light and colours refers also to technical aspects, using technical terms such as “suffusion” and “reflection.” However, she does not seem interested in examining further the scientific implications and aspects of Newtonian theories of colour and light, beyond the description of colours or her emotional response to them. She does not attempt to ‘teach’ any optical theories. However, she employs technical terms in the imagery both of her poetry and her fiction. She appropriates technical terms and scientific terminology in an attempt to experiment with scientific knowledge and authority and her experimentation with Newtonian colours and light is more evident in her poetry and is further assimilated in her prose writing.

In the following instance from Villette, feelings of awe and astonishment, some of the fundamental impressions of the Sublime according to Burke, as well as a fascination with light and colour reminiscent of Thomson’s poetry are induced in the viewer by light which is refracted and reflected into various sparkling colours of rocks, gems and rainbows. What is interesting in this passage is that what causes the feelings of the Sublime is not the sun or an ethereal, divine light from the sky; instead, it is the light from a man-made construction like the chandelier. This is part of Brontë’s attempt to appropriate the masculine discourse of technology; it shows that such aspects of reality are not out of a woman’s interest since she is deeply impressed and she responds vividly to such constructions:
I hardly noticed by what magic these doors were made to roll back—Dr. John managed these points; roll back they did, however, and within was disclosed a hall—grand, wide, and high, whose sweeping circular walls, and domed hollow ceiling, seemed to me all dead gold (thus with nice art was it stained), relieved by cornicing, fluting, and garlandry, either bright, like gold burnished, or snow-white, like alabaster, or white and gold mingled in wreaths of gilded leaves and spotless lilies: wherever drapery hung, wherever carpets were spread, or cushions placed, the sole colour employed was deep crimson. Pendent from the dome, flamed a mass that dazzled me—a mass, I thought, of rock-crystal, sparkling with facets, streaming with drops, ablaze with stars, and gorgeously tinged with dews of gems dissolved, or fragments of rainbows shivered. It was only the chandelier, reader, but for me it seemed the work of eastern genii: I almost looked to see if a huge, dark, cloudy hand—that of the Slave of the Lamp—were not hovering in the lustrous and perfumed atmosphere of the cupola, guarding its wondrous treasure. (V 233-234)

Brontë was fascinated by light and colour is depicted in terms of its various hues and tints which are used to attribute beauty and charm either to nature or to beloved people. Therefore, the Newtonian influence can be traced in Brontë’s writing regarding her description of colour and light.

Apart from the use of colours and light, Charlotte Brontë experiments with scientific terminology in more subtle ways in other instances. For example in Villette, Lucy Snowe talks of a “slight, very transparent … medium” through which she communicated with John Graham. The word “medium” reminds us of optical
terminology in Newton’s *Opticks*, mainly in Book II, Part III, Proposition I (pp 245-250) where he mentions the following:

Those Superficies of transparent Bodies reflect the greatest quantity of Light, which have the greatest refracting Power; that is, which intercede Mediums that differ most in their refractive Densities. And in the Confines of equally refracting Mediums there is no Reflexion. (*Opticks*, Book II, Part III, Proposition I, 246)

Newton goes on to comment on the difference in the angle of refraction of light, when light passes from one “medium” to another, that is, from water into air, or from glass into air, or from crystal into air (*Opticks* 246). It is this “medium” of air which is depicted as glazed with a screen of ice in *Villette*, and thus it conveys the alienation between Lucy and John Graham in a vivid literary imagery which appropriates scientific, optical terminology:

> He showed the fineness of his nature by being kinder to me after that misunderstanding than before. Nay, the very incident which, by my theory, must in some degree estrange me and him, changed, indeed, somewhat our relations; but not in the sense I painfully anticipated.

> *An invisible, but a cold something, very slight, very transparent, but very chill: a sort of screen of ice had hitherto, all through our two lives, glazed the medium through which we exchanged intercourse.* Those few warm words, though only warm with anger, breathed on that frail frost-work of reserve; about this time, it gave note of dissolution. I think from that day, so long as we continued friends, he never in discourse stood on topics of ceremony with me. (*V* 214, my italics)
Moreover, in *Jane Eyre*, the “charmed medium” is used by Rochester in a way that reminds us of a prism which filters Jane Eyre’s vision and conditions her perception:

“The glamour of inexperience is over your eyes,” he answered; “and you see it through a charmed medium: you cannot discern that the gliding is slime and the silk draperies cobwebs; that the marble is sordid slate, and the polished woods mere refuse chips and scaly bark. Now *here* (he pointed to the leafy enclosure we had entered) all is real, sweet, and pure.” (*JE* 215)

The Brontë family owned books which bore the influence of Newton’s optical theories. More specifically, Patrick Brontë owned Humphry Davy’s *Elements of Chemical Philosophy* (1812) which included large parts of Newton’s *Opticks*[^14] and the family also owned James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (ed 1803),[^15] Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* and Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1827) (Alexander and Smith 52-53)—all these were works which are prominent examples of the influence of Newton’s *Opticks* on eighteenth-century poetry and imagination, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson showed in her book.

In addition, Charlotte Brontë was exposed to optics as well as optical equipment and device of her time. Her growing familiarity with new technologies of vision is evident, especially in *Villette* (Glen, *Imagination in History* 227). As Heather

[^14]: In the chapter “Division 2, of radiant or ethereal matter” (109-126) in Davy’s book *Elements of Chemical Philosophy*, we read an extended reference to the main points of Newton’s optical theories as well as a quotation (121-123) of the complete Query 29 from his *Opticks*.

[^15]: As Alexander and Smith explain, this book is mentioned in Anne Brontë’s novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and Revd Patrick Brontë owned a number of books on scientific subjects like anatomy, pharmacology, chemistry and zoology which were available to the Brontë children without discrimination as the childish notes and scribbles in the margins show (338). The Brontë children had a considerable knowledge of scientific subjects and particularly natural history (Alexander and Smith 338).
Glen has shown in her book *The Imagination in History*, Sir David Brewster,\(^\text{16}\) the eminent optical researcher and inventor of the kaleidoscope, acted as Charlotte Brontë’s guide to the Great Exhibition in London in 1851; in his company she “began a little better to comprehend” the exhibition (Glen 218-219, 228). Besides, in her short story “Passing Events,” Charlotte Brontë refers to a “prism”\(^\text{17}\) and also to a “panorama,” in *Jane Eyre* she talks about the “ever-shifting kaleidoscope” of her own imagination, in *Villette* Heather Glen holds that Brontë indirectly refers to a “zoetrope,” and also she refers to other visual aids like a “reflector” which aided Madam Beck to spy on people in the garden, to a “glass” which De Hamal held to “one of his optics,” an “eye-glass” which Mrs Bretton used, a “spy glass” which M Paul used and Lucy refers to M Paul’s intellectual influence as “collyrium to the spirit’s eyes” (Glen 227-228).\(^\text{18}\)

Moreover, Urlike Walker locates a reference in Charlotte Brontë’s juvenilia to a “camera lucida.” Walker claims that this reference is an “error of terminology” on the part of Charlotte Brontë (37). She believes that Brontë mentions a “camera lucida” although she wanted to talk of a “camera obscura,” which was a common mistake. Because the “camera lucida” was a small and much less popular enlarging device,

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\(^{16}\) Sir David Brewster was a great admirer of Newton, and published his biography in 1831 entitled *The Life of Sir Isaac Newton*; however, he was criticised by some reviewers for hero-worship and idolisation of Newton (Higgit 12, 13).

\(^{17}\) Newton specified many details on how prisms should properly be prepared and used, as Shaffer explains (*Glass Works* 203). He gave experimenters instructions about the differences between prisms which were commonly available and those which could best display the phenomena he reported, making thus clear that the prism is an important factor in the conduct of the experiments (Shaffer, *Glass Works* 203). Newton addressed the problem of prism quality and design, considering thus prisms as experimental instruments (Shaffer, *Glass Works* 205). Prisms were important because they could demonstrate a new doctrine about the origin of colour; only properly working prisms could show that Newton’s doctrine was right and in order to persuade his audience that his doctrine was right, he had to persuade them to change the way they used prisms and to change the prisms they used (Shaffer, *Glass Works* 205).

\(^{18}\) For an extended discussion of the physiology of vision and corporeal sight in *Villette* in the context of contemporary innovations in eye surgery and optics, see also Katherine Inglis’ article “Ophthalmoscopy in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette.*”
Urlike Walker thinks it reasonable to assume that the “large camera lucida” which Brontë mentions is actually a more commonplace “camera obscura” (37).

Furthermore, Charlotte Brontë was particularly familiar with optics as a subject and part of the education of her times, since she refers to it in one of her letters to her friend Ellen Nussey. She comments on the reading of one of their friends, and she seems quite sceptical about whether Algebra and Optics can be suitable reading for a young lady. The extract from her letter reads as follows:

Joe’s attempts to improve his good partner’s mind make me smile. I think it all right enough and doubt not they are happy in their way, only the direction he gives his efforts seems of rather problematic wisdom—Algebra and Optics! Why not rather enlarge her views by a little well-chosen general reading? However, they do right to amuse themselves in their own way. (Brontë in Shorter, Vol 2, 314, my italics)

Although she does not seem quite favourable towards optics as part of a lady’s education, it is evident from this excerpt that Charlotte Brontë was familiar with this scientific field. So, she was not ignorant regarding optical issues and the optical technology of her times and this interest on her part is incorporated in her writing in various, indirect, subtle and refracted ways, even though it does not take the form of explicit scientific writing.

The most important reference in her writings about Opticks, which serves as a starting point in my study, is Charlotte Brontë’s use of the image of the prism in order to describe the mind in her youthful tale “Passing Events.” The text reads as follows:

Reader, as yet I have written nothing, I would fain fall into some regular strain of composition, but I cannot, my mind is like a prism full of colours but not of
forms . . . A Panorama is round me whose scenes shift before I can at all fix their features. (Brontë, “Passing Events” 129, my italics).

This is what her narrator, Charles Townshend, confesses in “Passing Events” (1836) (Glen, Imagination in History 227). According to Townsend who is Charlotte Brontë’s narrator, his mind is like a prism full of colours but not of forms. The ideas which occupy his mind are indefinite colours, without forms, restrictions and limits. Brontë recognizes a freedom in human perception where ideas are blurred, without colours, neither black nor white, and which do not fit in particular shapes and forms. However, the narrator resorts to a complaint for his inability to write, an inability to transubstantiate mental colours into forms, into textual representation. This utterance captures and foregrounds the complexities of the association of the optical device of the “prism” with the mind, introducing thus an optical discourse of the representation of the mind in Charlotte Brontë’s works.

What I would like to argue is that, on the basis of this reference it seems that not only was Brontë familiar with but also she assimilated fundamental notions of optics like the prism and the heterogeneity of light and colours and consciously incorporated them in her novels. This reference links the representation of the mind as prism, and the epistemological issues of perception and cognition that such a representation involves, with narrative. The colours of the mental prism demand a formal representation; that is, the abstract, indefinite colours of thoughts, feelings, ideas of the mind must turn into a concrete, coherent narrative. Brontë explains her conceptualization of the written text as a reflection of the mind, in her first novel. In The Professor, Crimsworth reads the composition written by his pupil, Mlle Henri and thinks:
‘Now,’ thought I, ‘I shall see a glimpse of what she really is; I shall get an idea of the nature and the extent of her powers. Not that she can be expected to express herself well in a foreign tongue; but still, if she has any mind, here will be a reflection of it.’ (P 97, my italics)

On this occasion, Crimsworth has access to the written text of his student which transforms into a reflection, a visual rendering of her mind. Thus, the written text becomes a reflection of the mind, a site which gives form to the colours of the prism of one’s mind. It seems as if the narrator’s mind is the prism, by means of which the light/story is analysed into its constituent colours/multiple perspectives and takes its formal representation in a textual form. The heterogeneity of sunlight can be seen as a metaphor for the heterogeneity of perspectives in Brontë’s perception of the world and the heterogeneity of voices in her narration of it. The heterogeneity of sunlight and the refracted colours coming out of the prism constitute an analogy for the narrative where a number of different voices emerge in the text and reveal different perspectives.

The representation of the mind in Charlotte Brontë’s works develops the parallelism of the mind with the prism, as shown in the extract from “Passing Events” quoted above, but also it extends to a more elaborate pattern which incorporates Newton’s optics in a more expansive way, including apart from the prism, also the “camera obscura,” a fundamental aspect of Newton’s optical experiments. At the same time the image of the prism is deployed to show the intricacies of narrative, delving into the labyrinth of fundamental, core issues that define the association of mental authorial intention and its verbal/textual representation. The image of the prism and the refracted colours coming out of it serve as an analogy for the narrative in Brontë’s novels, where a number of different voices emerge in the text and reveal
different perspectives, in an experimental, multilayered narrative which disturbs binaries like visibility/invisibility, reality/illusion, reason/imagination, obscurity/light, knowledge/intuition among other hierarchies.

3. VISION AND THE LITERARY TEXT: NEWTON’S *OPTICKS* AND NARRATOLOGY

The basic Newtonian model of analysis of colours into the prismatic colours can be summarised in the following phrase: light which initially appears white and homogeneous is analysed through the prism into its constituent colour-making rays. If we attempt to draw the outline of an analogy between the model of prismatic analysis of light as developed by Newton and the model of textual analysis provided by classical/structuralist narratology, we can see that there are points where the two models coincide, and one works as a metaphor for the other. So, if we consider that the aforementioned model which is valid for sunlight runs parallel to issues of literary analysis on a narratological basis, we may resort to questions like the following ones: what is the analogous in literary terms to the initial white and homogeneous mixture that is going to be analysed by a prism? Who or what functions as a prism in literary texts? What are the multiple colours/rays of a text? What is the result/effect of this process of analysis? In physics, the result of the prismatic analysis of sunlight is the prismatic colours of the spectrum. Is there an analogy for such a spectrum in narratology? Colours are not inherent qualities of the objects but are somehow created in the mind of the viewer. Who is the “viewer” of literary texts?

I would like to argue that answers to the aforementioned questions can be found, if we try to transfer Newton’s model to a literary and narratological context. An approach to such an attempt could be the following: *fabula is analysed through*
the narrator/focaliser into a story and its text. The reader is the recipient (viewer) of the whole process and the agent who “orchestrates” the whole venture is the author.

In other words, we could draw the following chart, providing an analogy between the main aspects of Newton’s theory, on the one hand, and the respective aspects of classical structuralist narratology on the other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homogeneous mixture</th>
<th>Fabula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prism</td>
<td>Narrator/ Focaliser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysed colours/rays</td>
<td>Story/ Plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum (Projection of the prismatic colours on the wall)</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewer of colours</td>
<td>Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimenter</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 Light is complex, “impalpable” as Roland Barthes mentions in his *Camera Lucida*, and ‘elusive’ recalling the nature of flames and fire in Mieke Bal’s “Ecstatic Aesthetics, Metaphoring Bernini.” Fire and flames function as a metaphor for the “fleeting nature of speech acts” (Bal, *Metaphoring* 16) in John Austin’s view that:

> fire, the flame, is precisely the paradigmatic example of speech act as performative: hovering between thing and event … How does one translate a flame? Given the metonymic logic of narrativity, any attempt to do so consumes it. As soon as one attempts to trace its shape, one falls back onto cold marble, and the flame disappears. (*Metaphoring* 16)

In this respect, light and colours hover between “thing and event,” that is, between material substance and sensation, since colour is not an inherent quality of a light ray, but, as Newton holds, in each ray there is the “power or disposition” to cause the “sensation” of a specific colour to the viewer. In Newton’s words:

> The Rays to speak properly are not coloured. In them there is nothing else than a certain Power and Disposition to stir up a Sensation of this or that Colour. (*Opticks* 124-125)

So, light and colours’ ‘elusive’ nature can be associated with the complexities of narratives and the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations, as explained by Mieke Bal in the following extract:

Since the advent of poststructuralist critique, we know that the language that constitutes the matter of all texts cannot be described according to the Saussurian axiom that suggested a one signifier–one signified equation. Language may unfold in linear fashion, but that unfolding in no way accounts for the multiple significations construed along the way, sometimes falling into dust before the end of the sentence. Meaning cannot be atomized, nor is it simply accumulative. Hence putting one word after another may have the semblance of linearity, but producing meaning does not. (*Metaphoring* 22)
To make my point clearer, I would like to elaborate on each of the matching pairs mentioned above:

*Homogeneous Mixture-Fabula.* Mieke Bal describes the fabula as a series of events which is primarily a product of imagination (*Narratology* 52). It is the primary material that the author has in mind and works on in order to produce the story and then the text. So, the result of the ordering of fabula’s events is the story. In other words, story is the effect of how the initial material, the fabula, has been handled (Bal, *Narratology* 49). The constitutive parts of the story pre-exist and co-exist inside the fabula. Therefore, as the rays that produce colours pre-exist in the white and seemingly homogeneous sunlight, so the elements of the story are innate in the fabula and they are revealed in the written text later through the handling of a literary “prism.”

*Prism-Focaliser/Narrator.* The fabula, that is the initial material in the writer’s mind, is handled and manipulated in order to produce a story; as a matter of fact, numerous stories can be produced from a single fabula. The narrator is the one who mediates between the author and the reader since he is the one who tells the story (Booth 145). In *The Professor, Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë adopted the autodiegetic narrator, who narrates the story of his or her life in the first person. It is the prism of

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20 I use the term fabula as used by Mieke Bal although there are variations in the terminology as Herman and Vervaeck explain (45). In order to disambiguate the terminology I offer the following chart from their book (45):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herman &amp; Vervaeck</th>
<th>Genette</th>
<th>Rimmon-Kenan</th>
<th>Bal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>story</td>
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*Fabula* belongs to the deepest level, the events of the story in chronological order as thought by the author, *story* is the sequence in which the events appear to the reader and *text* belongs to the surface level, what the reader has in front of his eyes.
his/her consciousness and emotions that reveals the colours of the narrative to the reader. However, Charlotte Brontë does not limit herself only to autodiegesis, but also experiments with the heterodiegetic, third-person narrator in *Shirley*. In this case too, the narrator is a “dramatized,” easily perceptible narrator who comments on his own narrative, who exposes his opinions and judgments and does not conceal himself in a reticent persona. So, it is the narrator who forms the prism through which the whole edifice of the narrative is perceived by the reader.

Apart from the narrator, the focaliser is also very important, because the focaliser represents optics and vision in the literary text. As Mieke Bal explains, the focaliser is the subject of point of view in the text, namely it is an agent in the literary work that represents vision (*Reading the Gaze* 158). Focalization refers to the steering perspective of the events of the fabula that is verbalized in the text by the narrator or voice (Bal, *Reading the Gaze* 158). So, focalization involves a degree of mediation between the sender/writer and the receiver/reader of the text (Bal, *Reading the Gaze* 158). In this respect, “focalization is already an interpretation, a subjectivised content” (Bal, *Reading the Gaze* 158), resulting in the most penetrating and the most subtle means of manipulation of the reader (Bal, *Narratology* 116).

There is an explicit distinction between the vision through which the elements are presented and the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision. In other words, the agent who sees (focaliser) is distinct from the agent who speaks (narrator) (Bal, *Narratology* 101). But even when the narrator and the focaliser coincide in what was traditionally called a first-person narrative, the point of view can vary. As Jonathan Culler explains in his introduction to Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*, point of view can vary, for example, on whether events are focalized through the consciousness of the narrator at the moment of narration or through his consciousness at a time in the
past when the events took place (10). So, both the voice/s of the narrator/s and the vision, as explored by the focaliser/s of the story, construct the prism through which the reader has access to the story in a process which involves manipulation and handling. This processing of the fabula involves its passing through some kind of “prism,” which manipulates and analyses its elements and interprets/translates them into a story. What takes up the function of the “prism” in literary terms, is the narrator and/or the focaliser of a story.

The Spectrum of Analysed Colours/Rays as Analogous to Story/Text. The outcome of the analysis of the fabula through the prism is the story, that is, the events as presented to the reader. In the end, the spectrum/projection of the colours on the wall of the Newtonian experiment is parallel to the trait of the story on the paper that is the literary text.

Viewer-Reader. The reader can be considered as an analogy to the viewer of colours. Colours are not inherent qualities of the objects but they are somehow created in the mind of the viewer. As Newton explained, rays are not coloured. In them there is “a certain power and disposition to stir up a sensation of this or that colour … Colours in the object are nothing but a disposition to reflect this or that sort of rays more copiously than the rest” (*Opticks* 124, 125). Therefore, the complication of the bipoles between objective/subjective, reason/fancy is one of the implications of *Opticks*, as Nicolson explains by using a quote from Joseph Addison’s *The Spectator* which reads as follows: “light and colours as apprehended by the imagination, are only ideas in the mind and not qualities that have any existence in matter” (*Addison* qtd in *Imagination* 399). So, like the colours which are created in the mind of the viewer, meaning is
constructed in the mind of the reader. This can be examined in relation to the objectivist/subjectivist debate in literature. As Ian Maclean explains, objectivism holds that there is one correct meaning inherent in any text, whereas subjectivism claims that there are as many meanings as there are readers (123). And he goes on to explain that the knowledge that a subject can derive from an object/text is limited by the subject’s particular interest in the object and perspective, thus linking the object/subject relationship with the process of understanding (Maclean 123). So, the basic question to be answered seems simple but it is not: as Maclean puts it, to what extent does a text determine its own meaning and how far is this meaning determined by the reader (123)?

*Experimenter-Author.* The author functions as an experimenter who designs the whole experiment of the writing of the text, and handles the prism of the narrator/focaliser. Newton was one of the most important experimenters of the era of the Scientific Revolution and he established rules for the conduct of experiments. Prisms and their handling were very important to his experiments as already mentioned, and only properly working prisms could show that his doctrines were right. To persuade the audience to believe in his doctrines, he had to persuade them to change the way they used prisms and to change the prisms they used (Schaffer, *Glass Works* 206). Prisms had to be handled in specific ways in order to produce particular results (Schaffer, *Glass Works* 207) and the quality of the prisms was of the outmost importance since bubbles, veins and tints could lead to erroneous conclusions (Schaffer, *Glass Works* 209).

So, in a literary framework the experimenter can be associated with the role of the author who designs the whole experiment of writing the text and handles the prism
that is the narrator and/or the focaliser. Gillian Beer holds that Victorian novelists started exploring for themselves the role of the observer or the experimenter rather than the designer or God (45). In this framework, Charlotte Brontë functions as a writer. Her narrators start their narratives as observers even of their own stories and gradually develop into more mature figures who experiment with their own lives and their environments. At the same time, Charlotte Brontë herself acts as an experimenter since she experiments on and explores her own narratives. She does so on many levels and in many occasions, as, for example, when she fertilizes her realist narratives with Gothic imagery and fantasy narratives to render the “psychological realism” of her heroes, in Alexander and Smith’s words (261), or when she experiments with narrative voice. In the latter case, she employs a male narrator in her first novel, The Professor, in an experimental narrative which exposes the dichotomy of a male speaking voice and the shadowy female author who controls and exposes him as Shuttleworth explains (124); then she moves on to the familiar voice of a female narrator in Jane Eyre; next she experiments with an omniscient narrator and splits the main heroine in two distinct female characters in Shirley; and last she turns back to the intimate voice and familiar subjectivity of the female narrator who narrates her own life, explored more profoundly and approached from a more mature perspective in the open ended story without closure of Villette.

In this framework of experimentation, as Ruth Parkin-Gounelas explains, Charlotte Brontë exhibits an experimental formulation of female subjectivity that influenced later attempts by women writers (Fictions of the Female Self 7). Because the restricted model of life as it was prescribed for Victorian women lacked the opportunities for free female expression and action, it was literature which offered to Charlotte Brontë and other female writers the field where they could experiment with
modes of inscription of the self (Parkin-Gounelas, *Fictions of the Female Self* 47). In the work of Brontë, we witness the construction and the formulation of female subjectivity, a process which involved compromise, experimentation, complicity and rebellion (Parkin-Gounelas, *Fictions of the Female Self* 3). The use of the novel as an acceptable “forum” where women could express themselves is stressed also by Robyn Warhol:

> Whereas men had ample opportunity to exert serious, didactic influence over others, women had few forums in which they could publicly "say something"; the realist novel provided one of the few socially acceptable and effectual outlets for their reforming impulses. (Warhol 18)

Even realism is seen by critics like Warhol as a means which women writers used to exert some political or moral influence on the “real world” via the novel which was the only “public opportunity” at their disposal to serve such a purpose (Warhol 23). Furthermore, as Alexander and Smith explain, Charlotte Brontë innovatively impregnated “commonplace realism” with Gothic imagery and romanticism:

> Charlotte’s uses of Gothic imagery innovatively achieve an equilibrium between realism and romanticism. Beyond evoking readers’ sensations of fear and wonder, her ruins, gloomy edifices, secret attics, stormy nights, apparitions, disturbing dreams, and unnatural phenomena portray characters’ psychology, often intensifying their emotions to the brink of psychic disturbance, but ultimately achieving *psychological realism*, an aspect of her fiction that distinguishes it from the more common preoccupation among Victorian novelists with external realism. In her hands such Gothic elements do not demonstrate paranormal forces so much as they reveal characters’
superstitions, transcendental beliefs, desires and subconscious awareness.

(Alexander and Smith 261 my italics)

Thus a conventional realist story seems insufficient to express all that Brontë wanted to tell. She used discourses of fantasy and imagination as opposed to logic and rationalism, to voice her thoughts and desires and to give form to a “psychological” reality which is not perceived by bodily eyes but by mental eyes. These discourses emerge in the mental site of the camera obscura and constitute alternative ways of perception and cognition which inform discourses of female epistemology which are reflected in her multivocal and multiperspective narratives. So, in this light female writing and experimentation are, maybe unexpectedly, closely linked and interwoven. Charlotte Brontë’s experiments with narrative forms and with the crossfertilization of conventional realism’s objectivity with fantasy and subjective vision is important because it challenges the late Victorian and early modernist criticism of realist novels as rather simplistic representations of worlds “too factual and superficial in their supposed objectivity” (Despotopoulou and Kitsi-Mitakou 1).

Refrangibility—Deviation from the Linear Direction of the Rays of Light. As mentioned before, different colours are produced because of different degrees of refrangibility of the rays. Therefore, a ray passing through the prism refracts, that is, it deviates from its linear course and produces colour. When we read a text, we sometimes get the impression that we look at various colours that create a “literary spectrum.” What, among many things, makes a text look like a spectrum is the deviation from a linear, predetermined, expected continuous course. This takes place on many levels and may take various forms, leading to multiperspectivity and multilayered narratives, which contribute to a more intense reading on part of the
reader. These deviations are means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, bringing about aesthetic or psychological effects, showing various interpretations of an event, indicating the subtle difference between expectation and realization among others as Bal explains (*Narratology* 52-53). Shifts which take place many times and on many levels, both in narration and in focalization, all contribute to multiperspectivity and to the construction of the ideological spectrum of a literary text.

4. HETEROGENEITY OF LIGHT AND NARRATOLOGY: BAKHTINIAN “HETEROGLOSSIA” AND POLYPHONY

The ‘prismatic narratives’ in Charlotte Brontë’s works can be studied under the light of notions like multiperspectivity, Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of heteroglossia, dialogism and multivocality as in instances like focalization and Free Indirect Discourse. The heterogeneity of light and its refraction through the prism is analogous to the heterogeneity of discourse in the novel as developed by Bakhtin. Bakhtin used the metaphor of light refraction to explore and explain ideas on discourse in order to support a basic idea of his theory, that of dialogism. According to Bakhtin, the novel is the genre which best illustrates the dialogic function of discourses and its central tradition is constructed by texts which are not “monological,” that is unitary and authoritarian in their discourse, but “dialogic,” that is, polyphonic and multiple (Rimmon-Kennan 115). This polyphonic quality is achieved through the “juxtaposition” of several voices in the text itself, but also through the incorporation of “previous discourse” which may consist in “anterior literary texts or aspects of

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21 Bakhtin juxtaposes the novel which he considers as dialogic to older, “high” art genres like the epic and poetry which are considered monological.
language and culture” (Rimmon-Kennan 115). However, we should note that dialogue and language do not refer only to actual dialogue between characters of the novel but they are used in a broader sense since in the novel, every language is a “point of view, a socio-ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representatives” (Bakhtin 411). So, Bakhtin sees discourse as socially and ideologically charged, not strictly in its personalised representation of the characters’ utterances in the novels.

In addition, the novel, Bakhtin argues, is unstable, undefinable and historical because it employs unofficial language and thought, reminding readers of familiar, everyday speech in contrast to the “official genres” of epic and poetry which are rule-governed and thus are considered as “hierarchical, historical and canonical” genres (Herndl 8, 9). The novel exposes the interaction of voices because it records ordinary speech and this happens because ordinary language always functions in context and always expects an answer, as Bakhtin argues (Herndl 9). So, meaning is not created in a single voice but through the interaction of voices, that is, in dialogue (Herndl 9).

The novel exposes this dialogue and, as long as there is a conflict between characters’ voices or between the narrator’s voice and the characters’, there will be “heteroglossia” in the novel, “that is multiple voices expressing multiple ideologies from different strata of language-in-use” (Herndl 9). A word, discourse, language or culture is “dialogized,” as contrasted with authoritative or absolute language, when it

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22 Tziovas holds that this polyphonic quality of the text reminds us of the notion of “intertextuality,” and that Kristeva may have owed a lot to Bakhtin for the development of her concept of intertextuality (Τζιόβας 113).

23 We should note that although in epic and in poetry there are different voices from different actors, their voices come from the same social strata—that is “they are impregnated with the same ideological background whereas in the novel, discourse is always open, changing, it is a discourse-in-process” (Herndl 9).
becomes relativized and “aware of competing definitions of the same things” (Holquist in Bakhtin 427). The dialogue in the novel may be external, that is, between two people, or internal, between an earlier and later self (Holquist in Bakhtin 427). So, the novel is a “fluid” and open-ended genre (Bakhtin 11) which represents all the social and ideological voices of its era, and thus it becomes “a microcosm of heteroglossia” (Bakhtin 411).

This polyphony of a text is better illustrated and described by Bakhtin in the “light-ray” metaphor where he talks about the phenomenon of “refraction” of the authorial intention in a prose text. As we can read in “The Dialogic Imagination”:

Every word is like a ray of light in a trajectory to both an object and a receiver. Both paths are strewn with previous claims that slow up, distort, refract the intention of the word. A semantic “spectral dispersion” occurs, but not within the object (as would be the case with self-enclosed poetic tropes) but before the word reaches the object, in the “occupied territory” surrounding the object. In any novelistic discourse one can trace … the “angle of refraction” of authorial discourse as it passes through other voices or voice and character zones. (Bakhtin 432)

The authorial intention can be refracted and distorted in its journey towards the reader. Meaning can be defined not only by the author. Other contextual parameters that ‘surround’ the word can affect meaning and the reader’s reception of the text, and such factors can be other voices, or expectations on the part of the reader himself. So, according to Bakhtin, the distinguishing feature of the novel as a genre consists in the fact that a diversity of voices and heteroglossia enter the novel and are defined by context (Bakhtin 300). The social contexts within which discourse is produced should be identified since they are the force which qualifies discourse itself namely its
“form” and “content” (Bakhtin 300). In this contextualized discourse (contrary to classical narratology which excluded context from discussion and narratological analysis), Bakhtin considers linguistic refraction as an inherent characteristic of discourse:

The intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at different angles, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embodied and already objectivized. (Bakhtin 300)

Furthermore, the effect of polyphony is achieved in a system where a number of competing voices function, either stabilizing or destabilizing, establishing and undermining authorial, hierarchical voices and ideologies. In Bakhtin’s words: “every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where both centrifugal and centripetal forces are at work” (272). In every utterance co-exist the “unitary language” with its centripetal forces and at the same time the centrifugal forces of social and historical heteroglossia (Bakhtin 272). According to Bakhtin, centripetal and centrifugal forces are respectively the centralizing and the decentralizing forces in any language or culture. The centripetal, that is, a homogenizing and hierarchicizing influence, is exercised by the high poetic genres of an era, whereas the centrifugal, that is, decrowning and dispersing forces of the clown, mimic and rogue, create alternative “degraded” genres (Bakhtin 425). The novel, as Bakhtin argues, is a de-normatizing genre and therefore it exerts centrifugal influence. Thus the novel emerges as a genre where discourse is polyprismatic, full of voices which are ideologically charged and which exert centripetal and centrifugal forces, either

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24 Bakhtin considered the novel as a polyphonous genre and he showed in his “work on Dostoyesvsky how every novel is a texture made up of registers and forms of language that each comprise a specific ideology” (Herman and Vervaek 121). Thus, Bakhtin is concerned with the level of narration as he focuses on voice (Herman and Vervaek 121).
supporting or undermining authoritative discourse. An example of how dialogism functions is described by James Phelan, who, following Bakhtin, does not consider a narrative text as a single-voiced monologue but deals with it as an:

exchange of voices in which the reader has an active role in weighing one voice against another. When reading a story, the reader hears the voices of all kinds of narrative agents—both inside and outside the story—and tries to distill from this polyphony one harmonious whole. This is precisely the way in which the reader gets actively involved in the story. In this active process, ethical values are shaped. Because of the polyphony, these values often remain ambiguous and go against a simple division in good and evil. (Herman and Vervaeck 123)

So, we should not ignore the reader’s role in the perception of this polyphony, since the text’s polyphony can only be heard by a reader who is willing to listen as Herman and Vervaeck argue (124). It can generally be said that post-classical narratologists consider the reader as important as the text, while their classical predecessors (structuralist narratologists) seem to prefer the text to the reader or even ignore the reader (Herman and Vervaeck 124).

One of the elements of the text which makes the notion of polyphony more comprehensible and serves as an instance of polyphony (actually of dual voice) is the case of Free Indirect Discourse. In this case the reader wonders whether the voice he hears is the character’s or the narrator’s. So, FID is a formal example which illustrates quite explicitly this polyphonic quality of texts (Rimmon-Kennan 115). It is an example of the bivocality or polyvocality of the text which exemplifies the merging of a number of speakers and attitudes (Rimmon-Kennan 113-114). As George Levine explains, FID “is a remarkably devious invention in that it is extremely good at
creating the illusion that consciousness is being rendered without authorial intervention, and that the language is the strictest representation … of the workings of a real character’s mind” (Realism 193).

Kathy Mezei holds that FID becomes a textual battlefield which exposes contesting voices and competing power relations between author, narrator, character-focaliser and reader (67). The merging of the voices of the narrator and the characters enhances the ambiguity of power-relations between the two, posing the question of whether FID exposes the narrator’s control over the character or the character’s intrusion into the narrator’s speech (Mezei 67). According to Mezei, a character who defies the narrator’s authority by voicing a different point of view may be immediately ironized by the narrator and thus silenced; or he may persist functioning as a subversive other voice, and thus he may even “contaminate” the narrator’s discourse resulting in “fertile hybridization” (71-72).

This merging of the voices in FID results in what Mezei calls its “slippage” between narrator and focaliser (75). This slippage destabilizes the reader because it unsettles his expectations of both the plot and the character and thus it makes him more open to changes (Mezei 75). To make her point clear, Mezei refers to an example in Austen’s Emma, where the narrator, by means of FID, “refracts” her discourse through Emma and in this way she diffuses, using Bakhtin’s terminology, “the authority of the monological authorial voice, permitting a voice of resistance to the marriage plot, to restrictive social codes and conventions, and to the constrained lives of women” (75). In Shirley, Free Indirect Discourse is employed to convey Caroline’s perspective when she sees Shirley and Robert Moore together enjoying a night walk and conversation (S 233-234). In this case, Caroline’s urgency and anxiety is communicated to the reader by letting him have immediate access to the objects of
her sight and to her thoughts. The narrator’s voice merges with Caroline’s voice, thus sympathizing with her and engaging the narratee in such feelings.

Apart from FID, focalization contributes to the multiperspectivity of the text since, as Genette argues, FID is an utterance, therefore it refers to the level of voice, whereas focalization is the representation of a character’s perspective, that is of what a character sees (Genette qtd in Mezei 70). So, focalization contributes to the textual spectrum of multiperspectivity, in the sense that “if dozens of characters function as focalizers, the result is polyphonic ideology, and the reader will have a hard time reconstructing the dominant view” (Herman and Vervaeck 78). According to Bal, the same object or event can be interpreted differently according to different focalisers (Vision and Textuality 159). So, ideology is inscribed in focalization and thus perspective becomes the main means of manipulation of the reader (Bal, Narratology 50). This is because the point of view from which the elements of the fabula are being presented directs the meaning that the reader will ascribe to the fabula and thus perspective becomes the placing of the point of view in a specific agent, as Bal argues (Narratology 50).

Generally, there is not one type of focalization which is continuous throughout a whole work. As Genette explains, there are many types of focalization; for example, non-focalized narrative, internal focalization—fixed, variable, multiple—external focalization (Narrative Discourse 189). And what is of interest is that, according to Genette, no single formula of focalization bears on an entire work, but rather on a definite narrative section which can usually be very short. Furthermore, the distinction between different points of view is not always clear (Narrative Discourse 191). So, it is this complex of short sections which are deviant from a consistent and continuous
focalization throughout a whole work, together with other instances like heteroglossia and dialogism in the novel that results in the “prismatic” quality of a literary text.

An instance of this merging of voices, which is not exactly FID but what Ruth Brandon describes as “a curious mix of direct and reported speech” (8) shows Brontë’s experimentation with formal aspects of a text in her attempt to explore polyvocality and models that can accommodate what she wants to say. In the following extract from *Shirley*, Mrs Pryor, Shirley’s former governess, resorts to a description of the hardships and the ambiguous position that a governess experienced in Victorian society:

> I was early given to understand that “as I was not their equal,” so I could not expect “to have their sympathy.” It was in no sort concealed from me that I was held a “burden and a restraint in society.” The gentlemen, I found, regarded me as a “tabooed woman,” to whom “they were interdicted from granting the usual privileges of the sex,” and yet “who annoyed them by frequently crossing their path.” The ladies too made it plain that they thought me “a bore.” The servants, it was signified, “detested me;” *why*, I could never clearly comprehend. My pupils, I was told, “however much they might love me, and how deep however the interest I might take in them, could not be my friends.” It was intimated that I must “live alone, and never transgress the invisible but rigid line which established the difference between me and my employers.” My life in this house was sedentary, solitary, constrained, joyless, toilsome. The dreadful crushing of the animal spirits, the ever-prevailing sense of friendlessness and homelessness consequent on this state of things began ere long to produce mortal effects on my constitution. I sickened. The lady of the house told me coolly I was the victim of “wounded vanity.” She hinted
that if I did not make an effort to quell my “ungodly discontent,” to cease “murmuring against God's appointment,” and to cultivate the profound humility befitting my station, my mind would very likely “go to pieces” on the rock that wrecked most of my sisterhood—morbid self-esteem—and that I should die an inmate of a lunatic asylum. (S 375-376)

In this extract, as Brandon explains, the parts in the quotation marks are taken verbatim from a long article by the critic and art historian Lady Eastlake in the influential *Quarterly Review*, in which she commented on the lives of the governesses as a response to *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* (8). By means of the merging of the two voices, that of her governess-narrator and the verbatim parts of negative criticism of the article, Brontë manages to reach a synthesis of the two contradictory perspectives. Thus, she is ironic and attacks the snobbbery of her reviewer, and at the same time she offers a political comment on the issue of the social position of the governess of her time, exposing this way the text’s dialogue with its social context.

I would like to argue that Charlotte Brontë’s writing experiments not only with the content of her work but also with the way she expresses what she wants to say. The multiperspectivity and the multivocality of the discourse she uses, which is subtle and not explicit, constructs a proto-feminist narratological model which draws on Newton’s optical model. This becomes evident if we consider the ideological manifestations which underpin a multi-layered narrative, within a joint framework of Baktinian and feminist analysis.
5. Feminist Narratology’s Response to Bakhtin

A feminist framework appropriates the idea that an utterance is multi-layered and full of different meanings; the marginal female voice represents the centrifugal force which threatens to disrupt the centripetal forces of male authority and “liberate all alternative voices in a heteroglossia which the author has either not catered for or has deliberately tried to suppress” (Ruzy 1). This is what Charlotte Brontë does, for example, in her first novel *The Professor*, in which she constructs the persona of a male narrator, who embodies a particularly patriarchal discourse in the framework of which emerge contrasting female voices. In her next novels, she moves on to more complex discussions where the centrifugal and centripetal forces are very often subtly embodied by female narrators and characters.

As already seen, dialogism depends also on context and it is an on-going, open and not stable process (Bauer and McKinstry 2). Parameters like gender, social class and race are in dialogue rather than in opposition, and even in cases of opposition, dialogue is not cancelled but always in process and in flux (Bauer and McKinstry 3). As far as the idea of resistance is concerned, which is a fundamental idea of feminism, it is not always voiced in authoritative or public ways; instead, the idea of resistance can begin privately, in cases where women negotiate, manipulate, or subvert the systems of domination that they encounter (Bauer and McKinstry 3). In other words, as Bauer and McKinstry explain: “the conflict of discourse in a novel, the inevitable polyvocality of a genre that reproduces language as a web of communications between narrator and narratee, speaker and listener, character and character, and even (implied) author and (implied) reader, does reveal the dominant discourse” (Bauer and
McKinstry 4) against which centrifugal discourses, like the feminist one, develop. For example, Bauer and McKinstry cite the example of the “inevitable” happy ending of marriage in nineteenth-century novels as the voice of that dominant discourse; in Charlotte Brontë’s novels we can locate discourses of resistance in this discourse, as for example the ambiguous end of *Villette* which questions marriage as a life goal that guarantees happiness and bliss for a woman.

As Diane Price Herndl explains, there is a parallel between Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic discourse and theories of feminine language which describe “a multivoiced or polyphonic resistance to hierarchies and laughter at authority” (8). The representation of different voices which come from different social strata accommodate feminist criticism since it claims that women represent a different stratum of society which is oppressed (Herndl 10). However, Herndl seems to question the possibility of having a genuinely feminine language since women use a male dominated language and function within a patriarchal system (17). And within the framework of plural or even contradictory readings and meanings in the text, feminist criticism emphasizes “the political need for strategic readings” and the desire to escape monological, hierarchical ways of thinking and writing (Herndl 18, 19). In addition, Herndl focuses on the polyphony within feminist criticism and seems concerned with the tendency of feminist voices to attack each other on the grounds of disagreement, resulting in a polyphony which risks producing “cacophony, with every sound getting lost among the other, competing sounds” (20). And she further poses new questions referring to dialogism such as the question of with who are feminist critics in dialogue and what sort of dialogue this is (20).

In Bakhtin’s theory, dialogue is present in every meaningful utterance, and if we search for the weakest voices, we can hear them (Rosenthal Shumway 155).
Feminism seems quite concerned with the idea of dialogue in the sense that it recognizes dialogue as a form of oppression, in which the party with the weakest and less unified voices is oppressed (Rosenthal Shumway 155). The main difference between Bakhtin and feminist dialogics is that Bakhtin is concerned with detecting weaker voices in a text but shows no intention to strengthen such voices, whereas feminism demands a victory on the part of female voices since it is dedicated to the detection and reinforcement of weaker female voices in a text (Rosenthal Shumway 115). We can say that even the detection of weaker voices is a means of strengthening them and making them audible; however it is this lack of a clear political purpose to deliberately reinforce female voices on Bakhtin’s part which sets an important difference between his theory and feminism.

In addition, as Susan Lanser explains, there is a polyphonic quality in the female voice itself; on the one hand, it seems to conform to male rhetoric and, on the other hand, it seeks ways to undermine it (Lanser qtd in Herman and Vervaeck 138). She follows Bakthin as far as the term of polyphony is concerned, but what was seen as a general characteristic of the literary text is considered by her as a typically female characteristic (Herman and Vervaeck 138). The female voice hovers between subordination and authority between the private and the public, so its undecidability and ambiguity, are often interpreted in feminism as a characteristic of femininity (Lanser qtd in Herman and Vervaeck 138).

\[25\] However, we should not over overlook the fact that not every single female voice in every text is polyphonic and subversive. There are many instances where female characters reproduce patriarchal ideology and stereotypes. In Charlotte Brontë’s novels there are instances like Miss Blanche Ingram in *Jane Eyre* who appears to accommodate stereotypical, patriarchal assumptions about women, and other characters, like Shirley, who question patriarchal assumptions and undermine them at least to some degree.
Until the mid-1990s, as Warhol explains, classical narratology did not mention gender as a factor that could influence the narratological models described by narratologists like Genette, Prince and Bal (4). This choice was the result of the overall lack of interest in the contextual element on part of structuralist narratology (Warhol 4). However, feminist narratology takes contextual elements into consideration and focuses especially on sex and gender, since it holds that gender, sex and sexuality play a central role in the construction and interpretation of narrative texts, whereas classical narratology excludes all those aspects (Herman and Vervaeck 104, 130). So, in the framework of post-classical narratology, a narrative is not considered as universal or neutral; the context within which it functions should be taken into account and this context consists in factors such as social class, sex, age, economic and professional position, physical condition and education (Herman and Vervaeck 130-131).

In post-classical narratology, ambiguity often characterizes the representation of consciousness since sometimes we do not know who is thinking or uttering a sentence (Herman and Vervaeck 110). In such instances, structuralists would resort to studying other textual elements in order to decide who says what (Herman and Vervaeck 110). On the other hand, post-classical narratology is open to

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26 The term post-classical narratology is borrowed by David Herman to denote all the narratological approaches which partly resist classical structuralist narratology but at the same time rarely make a complete break from it; some classical narratological concepts are adopted while others are adapted or rejected (Herman and Vervaeck 103). In addition, Herman and Vervaeck almost align post-classical with postmodern narratology, by defining postmodern narratology as a vague category which combines elements from classical narratology with new insights without striving for a higher synthesis (Herman and Vervaeck 108). They attribute to postmodern narratology three main characteristics, among others; first, in postmodern narratology a literary text is not limited only to its literary aspects but it also concerns elements which used to be excluded from classical narratology like ideology, biography, social condition and so on. Second, no fixed methodology can be applied to a literary text since it is not viewed as “a house with clearly demarcated floors but as … a conglomerate of the most diverse narrative elements.” So, the literary text is dependent on the insights and qualities of each narratologist. Third, postmodern narratology pays attention to everything that does not belong to a neat system and prioritizes anything that undermines itself, or in other words, everything that was excluded in classical narratology becomes the centre of attention in postmodern narratology (Herman and Vervaeck 109-111).
interpretations since any narratological analysis depends on the standpoint of the narratologist. There is no “fixed point of the interaction” (Herman and Vervaeck 114) in postmodern narratology. As Herman and Vervaeck explain, post-classical narratology seems to focus on the undecidability of a text and to consider that the constant alternation of viewpoints and images and the refusal to choose a single viewpoint constructs the ethical and ideological aspect of a text (128).

This ambiguity which is so crucial for the ideological implications of a text employs elements of the classical narratology, since it is enhanced by textual characteristics like focalization and free indirect speech (Herman and Vervaeck 128) which can be highlighted and explored by narratologists. So, elements and terminology of classical narratology can help us in our understanding of elements of the text which can contribute to the construction of the ambiguity and fluidity of the female subject, as conceptualized by recent feminist criticism. As Warhol explains:

Narratology has given us names for literary conventions that formalist terminology made very difficult to discuss. (For example, consider the complications of describing the narrative techniques of Henry James or Jane Austen without the concept of "focalization"; consider the absurdity of referring to "Fielding" in *Tom Jones* as a "third-person narrator" when his "I" is so omnipresent.) What makes narratology so useful is that it can take gender studies a step further into a tangible, arguable position on particular texts: instead of simply talking in generalities about "women's styles," it can genuinely point to the features that constitute those styles in narrative. (Warhol 13-14)

So, what narratology can do is help us recognise and describe the differences we find in texts written by men and women and this is a first step in the development of a
“poetics of gendered discourse” (Warhol 15). However, the limits between sex differences as well as the possibility of choice have been challenged in feminist thinking, as in the case of Judith Butler where the notion of sex and gender are totally separated:

When the constructed status of the gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one. (Butler 10)

On the basis of this conceptualisation of gender as a “free-floating artifice,” critics like Ruth Page question whether there is in fact enough evidence to prove that men and women do tell stories differently from one another (Page 53). As she explains:

It is now generally accepted that a binary model of gender is reductive and, following the groundbreaking work of Butler (1990), it has been proposed that a performative approach that takes account of the multiple and shifting nature of gender is more helpful in understanding the linguistic behaviour of a given individual in a specific situation. (Page 53)

Feminist research in narratology focuses not only on the text itself but on an entire system that is the sender of the text (the author), the message (narrative form), and the receiver (the reader) (Herman and Vervaeck 133) and in this framework it pays attention to motifs like experience and desire; the struggle for authority; ambiguity; the corporeal (Herman and Vervaeck 133). But it mostly deals with the combination of resistance and complexity; female authors, narrative strategies and readers are often represented as struggling against an existing male tradition (Herman and Vervaeck 133). In such a context, there are two poles: the male pole which appears to be
unequivocal comprising well-delineated traditions, pursuits and identities as opposed to the female pole which is characterized by ambiguity, vague traditions, camouflaged (because repressed) pursuits, trangressive identities (Herman and Vervaeck 133-4). As Herman and Vervaeck hold, traditional male narratives are endless movements between two poles; the man as an active agent, the woman as a passive object (Herman and Vervaeck 143). On the one hand, feminist narratology recognizes an opposition between man and woman and, on the other hand, woman seems to “harbour” this opposition in herself and thus is ambiguous (Herman and Vervaeck 143). In addition, Mezei pinpoints the “pervasive theme of ambiguity” the sites of which include the discourses of “the narrator, the focaliser, the reader, the authority, subjectivity, historicity, linearity, or specific structures and features of narrative and discourse and their complex interrelations” (Mezei Introduction 2). So, ambiguity is repeatedly present in feminist discussions of narrative form; on the one hand, there is complicity and subordination, and on the other hand, there is resistance and undermining—according to de Lauretis, narratology should neither resolve this ambiguity nor ignore it, but simply map it (Herman and Vervaeck 144).

In this framework of ambiguity, the polyphony and the clash of the voices in Brontë’s narratives which either stabilize or destabilize patriarchal discourse vary. For example, we may hear the patriarchal voice of Mr Crismworth, “a dominant male whom one can call ‘master’” (Davies 74) in The Professor, but at the same time we witness his wife, Mlle Henri, declare that she will continue to work after her marriage to him. Moreover, Jane Eyre “gased” for and desired liberty (JE 85) and also we hear Caroline’s appeal to the “fathers of England” to educate their daughters in Shirley. Besides, Brontë defies the traditional happy ending of blissful marriage in Villette, with an ambiguous “experimental,” and “proto-postmodern” (Depotopoulou
and Kitsi-Mitakou 5) ending leaving open the option for her heroine to spend the rest of her life as an independent and successful directress of a boarding school and not a happy housewife.

This framework of experimentation as well as ambiguity seems to be illustrated best in the figure of the female educator. The female educator embodies ambiguity, because of a social position which is ambivalent between middle and working class, as already seen in the extract from Shirley quoted before. The governess was a “dangerous social example” which reminded people of the “tremendous financial fluidity” of that time since usually she was a wealthy woman who found herself in financial distress and had to work as a governess in order to survive (Brandon 13). Moreover, in the Victorian society, the middle-class woman was expected to marry and have children and so in this framework the independent spinster was “a worrying anomaly” as Brandon puts it (13). The female governess/educator was a liminal figure who posed crucial questions on what the woman’s position in the world should be, as Brandon notices. However, it is exactly this anomalous social position that Brontë addresses in her novels, in order to explore the possibilities of alternative female positions where a woman can function in the social context of her time.

So, the female educator, and by extension the female educator’s profession, are used by Brontë as an excellent opportunity to proclaim independence for her female heroines and thus the female educator becomes one of the proto-feminist figures of the working woman who earns her own living and supports herself independently of a man. In Charlotte Brontë’s novels, the female educator is the figure who is also invested with power of the mind, an urge to learn, to achieve social as well as spiritual progress in life, and a thirst to explore and test her own potential
and her abilities. Thus, the female educator is approached both as a social construct who develops through dialogue with her social environment as well as an epistemological agent, a pillar of the knowledge economy of her times, whose textual representation of the mind traces a progress from ignorance to knowledge, from obscurity and darkness to light.

6. GENDER AND KNOWLEDGE: FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES

The image of the female educator best illustrates the progress of the female subject in the social context of her time, since it is the profession of the educator which drags her from the obscurity of the house and makes her visible and able to construct a dialogic relation with her social environment. At the same time, the educator as a professional is directly engaged with knowledge and the knowledge economy of her time, and therefore with epistemology. This is so, because the female educator is directly involved with various types of knowledge and its communication to other people as part of her duty to educate little children, and at the same time, she is fervently involved in her own self-education or, in Marianne Thormählen’s words, “knowledge acquisition.” Therefore, the discussion of various types of knowledge that follows aims at shedding light on the epistemological agency of the female educator.

Traditionally, knowledge is considered to be perspectiveless, that is, it is considered as an ‘objective’ account of the world and its phenomena. Although knowledge is produced by individuals, there is the presumption that there should be nothing “personal or idiosyncratic” about it so as to be considered as “genuine” knowledge (Grosz 191; Anderson 151). It is this assumption of lack of perspective and of the notion of objectivity that feminist epistemology challenges and questions.
Feminism claims that in fact there is a highly political perspective in knowledge, which is often the perspective of rich, educated and powerful men of science:

Traditional epistemology was a theory for knowledge makers in a straightforwardly political sense; it supported the elites who in fact exercised cognitive authority through knowledge-making institutions. Feminist scholars have pointed this out by saying that traditional epistemology supported male dominance and patriarchy. (Addelson 265)

The ideals of Enlightenment and rationality have been largely challenged since the 1960s (Levine, *Dying to Know* 11). In the 1980s, Loraine Code explicitly posed the issue of whether the sex of the knower is epistemologically significant (qtd in Anderson 150). As Loraine Code explains:

Feminist critiques of epistemology and philosophy of science/social science have demonstrated that the ideals of the autonomous reasoner—the dislocated, disinterested observer—and the epistemologies they inform are the artifacts of a small, privileged group of the educated, usually prosperous, white men. ... The ideals of rationality and objectivity that have guided and inspired theorists of knowledge … have been constructed through processes of excluding the attributes and experiences commonly associated with femaleness and underclass social status: emotion, connection, practicality, sensitivity and idiosyncracy. … So these systematic excisions of “otherness” lead to the demonstration that the ideal of objectivity is a generalization from the subjectivity of quite a small social group, which has the power, security and prestige to believe that it can generalize its experiences and normative ideals
across the social order, thus producing a group of like-minded practitioners ("we") and dismissing "others" as deviant and aberrant ("they"). (Code 21-22)

It was in the antipode of such subtle masculine perspectives in science and in the construction of knowledge about the world that discussions on epistemology from a ‘female’ perspective emerged; these were interested in challenging male-oriented traditional assumptions on knowledge and science and in exploring new, alternative epistemologies which prioritize a female point of view. As Helen Longino explains, “feminists, faced with traditions in philosophy and in science that are deeply hostile to women, have had practically to invent new and more appropriate ways of knowing the world” (Longino 101). These new female-oriented ways of knowing are of course the revival and reevaluation of alternative or suppressed traditions rather than totally new inventions and they range from “the celebration of insight into nature through identification with it, to specific strategies of survey research in the social sciences” (Longino 101).

Gender is one of the main factors that qualifies the construction of knowledge and has been an issue intensely debated in both the natural and the social sciences. An example of gender-bias against women is evidenced in the exclusion or marginalization of women scientists/researchers from “mainstream science” in the form of limitation of their resources, or their professional standing which leads to limitations or impairments in their scientific progress (Anderson 5). Generally, gender is not an “enclosed category,” functioning in a vacuum, since “it is always interwoven with other socio-political –historical locations such as class and race” (Code 20). As Loraine Code says, “gender is experienced differently by people and it plays differently into structures of power and dominance at its reverse intersections with other specificities” (20). Therefore, “the presumption of gender-neutrality which is
central to standard epistemology that gender has nothing to do with knowledge, that
the mind has no sex, that reason is alike in all men, and man ‘embraces’ woman” is
impossible to sustain (Code 20).

In addition, scientific knowledge “is not the static end-point of enquiry but a
cognitive or intellectual expression of an ongoing interaction with our natural and
social environments” (Longino 116). In this framework, scientific knowledge is the
outcome of the dialogue in which individuals and groups with different points of view
are engaged, therefore knowledge is constructed not by individuals but by “an
interactive dialogic community” (Longino 112). Longino explains that because “each
individual occupies a location in a multidimensional grid marked by numerous
interacting structures of power asymmetry the analytical task is to understand how
these complexly conditioned subjectivities are expressed in action and belief”
(Longino 109). Therefore, if gender is considered as a component of knowledge, can
we speak of “gender-specific” knowledge?

Theorists of science like Thomas Nagel have recognized that “subjective” or
“perspectival facts” (what it is like to be an organism x having an experience e) are
essentially connected to a specific point of view. For example, in his essay “What is it
like to be a bat?” Nagel claims that to grasp a bat’s experience, one would have to
become a bat oneself. Nagel concludes that subjective facts embody a specific point
of view and are accessible only to the subjects who occupy that point of view or
perspective. Therefore, using his rationale as a starting point, Dalmiya and Alcoff
claim that it is reasonable to speak of a gender-specific point of view in which the
subject’s being of a particular gender becomes essential or constitutive of the
characteristic “inner feel” of a particular gender related experience (Dalmiya and
Alcoff 228). Besides, to talk of “gender-specific” points of view is to imply that
“inner” features of an experience are structured not only by neurophysiological but also by social and cultural factors (Dalmiya and Alcoff 229).

In addition, Damiya and Alcoff suggest another less traditional way of knowing, which might be called “gender-specific experiential knowing” as a type of the more general “experiential” knowledge. They draw on the example of the obstetrician and the midwife, and on the difference between the “objective” knowledge of the doctor as opposed to the “empathy” of the midwife—who may know from personal experience what it is for a woman to be in labour—and the fact that sometimes a midwife may offer more help to a woman in labour than the doctor (Damiya and Alcoff 228). It is her “know-how,” namely her experiential knowledge, that renders her equally effective to the well-learned doctor. Therefore, Dalmiya and Alcoff repeat the feminist claim that knowing needs to incorporate accounts of the “knowing how” and experiential knowledge along with propositional knowledge (“knowing that”) which traditionally had been considered as the only valid approach to cognition (241).

Feminist epistemology claims that knowers are situated in particular relations to what is known and to other knowers: therefore, what is known as well as the way it is known reflects the situation or perspective of the knower (Anderson 1; also Haraway 581). Therefore, according to Elizabeth Anderson, if we consider knowledge as situated and gender as a social situation, then it is reasonable to assume that what people know, or think they know, can be influenced by their own gender, other people’s genders or by ideas about gender (Anderson 1). And she goes on to explain that feminist epistemology does not consider simple propositional knowledge about matters “which are equally accessible to anyone with basic cognitive and sensory apparatus”(1), for example 1+1=2, as gendered. In fact, other kinds of knowledge are
considered as gendered by feminist epistemology, namely “phenomenological knowledge, knowledge of persons, ‘know-how’ knowledge, moral knowledge, knowledge informed by emotions, attitudes, and interests” (Anderson 1).

As Anderson explains, feminist epistemology has developed within three broader epistemological traditions: standpoint theory, postmodernism and empiricism. Standpoint epistemology considers as privileged epistemic standpoints, those of the disadvantaged social groups which know from ‘the inside’ the oppression and the social conditions that lead to it, whereas the standpoint of the privileged groups offers only surface knowledge and represents social phenomena only in relation to the interest of a privileged class (Anderson 2). In this respect, the Feminist Standpoint Theory attributes an epistemic privilege to the standpoint of women, regarding issues of gender-relationships and of social and psychological phenomena in which gender is implicated. However, the possibility of a unified standpoint for women is questioned (Anderson 2; Harding 65; Longino 106). And according to Longino, even if there is such a standpoint, it usually coincides with the perspective of the relatively privileged white women (Anderson 2).

In postmodernism, the knowing subject is not autonomously created but is socially constructed and occupies multiple social identities at the same time: and as Anderson argues, “the tension among these conflicting identities offers a disruption in the discursive systems that construct us” (Anderson 3). Gender is socially constructed and a strategy for negotiating the theories produced by differently situated women is

27 A classic example of standpoint epistemology is Marxist Standpoint Theory which claims that the “proletariat” has an epistemic privilege in the knowledge of fundamental issues like economics, sociology and history. Workers do not have such privilege in the beginning but they can attain it by constructing a collective consciousness of their role in society. Their social situation provides them with such knowledge, because they are oppressed, although central in the capitalist mode of production, endowed with a cognitive style based on their material interaction with nature (Anderson 2).
perspective-shifting (Anderson 2). The knowing subject is not unified but multiple and in constant flux.

Last, most traditional philosophy of science has adopted some sort of empiricism. Empiricism considers experience as the primary or the only source and justification of knowledge, and that the content of experience can be described by “fixed and value-free sense-data” (Anderson 4). However, feminist empiricists are concerned with the way in which feminist values can inform experience, empirical inquiry and scientific methods. So, feminist empiricists are concerned with the way social practices which relate to gender, class or race can influence an inquiry. They believe in a socialized epistemology, in which inquiry is considered primarily as a social process and communities or networks of individuals are regarded as the subjects of knowledge rather than only individuals (Anderson 4).

The contradictory perspectives show the multiplicity and the diversity of the female as an epistemological agent. The female figure which best embodies the quest for knowledge and the urge to know is the female educator. And the representation of the mind in Charlotte Brontë novels takes the form of the prism as she herself has stated. However, it expands to an elaboration of the image of the camera obscura in which Newton developed his optical experiments. The camera obscura in Charlotte Brontë’s novels becomes a site of negotiation between the centripetal forces of the objective, rationalized vision of the male experimenter and the emerging, disturbing, centrifugal forces of the subjective vision of an agent who resorts to alternative epistemological tools, like the instinct, and to non-scientific discourses. Thus, what starts as camera obscura’s enclosure expands to prismatic narratives, to a spectrum of voices and perspectives which explore alternative epistemologies and the female educator’s quest for knowledge. In all Brontë’s novels the female educator as an
epistemological agent progresses from ignorance to knowledge, from obscurity to light. The quest for knowledge is both an issue of private consideration and ambition as well as a social act, involving the interaction and discursive relationship of the female subject with her social environment. The female educator emerges as the most powerful epistemological agent in comparison with the rest of the female figures of the novels, thus reinforcing her epistemological potency. However, as I would like to show, she contrasts her epistemic viewpoint with other women’s epistemic viewpoints and reflects the heterogeneity within the body of the feminist epistemology itself.

7. NEGOTIATING THE SPACE OF THE CAMERA OBSCURA: OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE VISION

The epistemological progress from obscurity to light which Brontë traces in the figures of her heroines/female educators takes place on the site of the camera obscura. In this enclosed space the viewing subject initially is constructed as a detached observer exerting an objective type of vision and later she resorts to more subjective types of vision which liberate her thinking and probe her self-education.

As Jonathan Crary explains, the subject of the camera obscura28 is disembodied and interiorized (Crary 40). The camera obscura defines an observer who is “isolated, enclosed and autonomous within its dark confines” (Crary 39). It implies a withdrawal from the world, so that the viewer can study his relation to the “exterior” world (Crary 39). It underlines a sense of interiority, where the observer is

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28 According to Jonathan Crary the camera obscura was widely used as a model of perception in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it was withdrawn in the beginning of the nineteenth century and was replaced by new modes of perception (16, 27). However, Urlike Walker contends that in fact the camera obscura was not totally effaced but remained influential in the nineteenth century both as a metaphor and as technology (2).
both a “free sovereign individual” and a “privatized subject, confined in a quasi-
domestic space, cut off from the public exterior world” (Crary 39). This interiority is
supplemented by the decorporalisation of vision; in the camera obscura, the
observer’s physical and sensory experience is displaced by the relations between a
mechanical apparatus and an “objective truth” (Crary 39-40). 29

This interiorized and disembodied subject of the camera obscura is employed
both in Newton’s Opticks and Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding
(1690). Both texts show how the camera obscura was a model both for the
observation of empirical phenomena and for reflective introspection (Crary 40). The
site of Newton’s inductive procedures throughout Opticks is the camera obscura;30 it
is the ground where knowledge is made possible (Crary 40). In the beginning of the
Opticks he mentions:

In a very dark Chamber, at a round hole, about one third Part of an Inch broad,
made in the shut of a window, I placed a glass prism, whereby the Beam of the
sun’s Light, which came in at that hole, might be refracted upwards toward the
opposite wall of the chamber, and there form a coloured image of the Sun.

(Opticks 26; also qtd in Crary 40)

29 There is a strong connection between the two. As Nicolson explains, Locke’s Essay contributed to
the reading of metaphysical implications into Newton’s Opticks (Newton Demands the Muse 144).
Locke was well aware of Newton’s prismatic discoveries before the publication of his Essay, as
Nicolson holds on the basis of a comparison between two drafts of his Essay (Newton Demands the
Muse 7).

30 Toulmin considers Newton’s Opticks as one of the seminal texts which introduced a tradition of a
consideration of a literal interiority of mental actions. It is not only the image of the camera obscura
that Newton employed but also his sensorium theory which was developed in his Opticks (Query 28),
which was influential in the next two hundred years among “enlightened thinkers” (Toulmin 4).
Newton writes:

Is not the Sensory … that place … into which the sensible Species of Things [i.e. sensory
images] are carried through the Nerves and Brain, that here they may be perceived by their
immediate presence to [the mental] Substance?” (Opticks 370; also qtd in Toulmin 4)

And perception is conceived to be placed literary inside our minds, where only the sensible images of
things:

… are carried through the Organs of Sense into our little Sensoriums, are there seen and
beheld by that which in us perceives and thinks. (Opticks 370; also qtd in Toulmin 4)
What is described above is a camera obscura as Crary explains. In the model of the camera obscura the role of the observer is ambiguous: on the one hand, the observer is separate from the pure operation of the device and, on the other hand, his presence implies a physical simultaneous presence of human subjectivity and the objective apparatus (Crary 41). Therefore, Crary describes the observer of the camera obscura as a “free-floating inhabitant of the darkness, a marginal supplementary presence independent of the machinery of representation” (Crary 41). For example, in *Villette* we see this objective scientific, rationalized viewing grow and become gradually disrupted by other epistemologies and gothic elements, like the figure of the nun.

Jonathan Crary claims that in the beginning of the nineteenth century, vision itself became an object of knowledge and observation, rather than a privileged form of knowing (70). In this reaction to Newtonian authority in the beginning of the nineteenth century, we should add Goethe’s response. He was one of the first to openly challenge Newtonian theories and authority and he developed his own theory of colours. After a century of Newton’s authority, a spirit against Newton and new theories emerged (Burwick 8).

Goethe was interested in colours, and challenged Newton’s theories and experimental methods. He performed his own experiments and developed his own theories about the production of colour. By placing the prism in front of his own eyes, and not in front of the tiny aperture inside a dark room as Newton did in the past, Goethe devised his own methodology which was in fact based on a “negation of the camera obscura” (Crary 68). Thus, he focused on subjective vision. As Jonathan Crary puts it:
The corporeal subjectivity of the observer, which was a priori excluded from the concept of the camera obscura, suddenly becomes the site on which the observer is possible. (Crary 69)

Therefore, Newton set the example of objective scientific approach whereas Goethe performed subjective experiments exploring what enters the eye through the prism and wanted to gain control of the internal perception processes (Platts 206). Newton’s experiment was objective: as Burwick explains, he observed the beam of sunlight entering the prism, and the ray of light was analyzed in different colours which produced a colourful spectrum on the opposite wall; thus Newton deduced that sunlight is heterogeneous, composed of colour-producing rays of different “refrangibility.” On the other hand, Goethe’s experiment was subjective: he placed the prism before his eyes and he deduced that colour arose on the surface or boundary between two surfaces, because of the interaction or tension between light and darkness and thus he was convinced that he found fault with Newton’s method (Burwick 11). Therefore, Goethe’s starting point was the reverse of Newton’s since for Goethe perception was seen as a process of synthesis and not analytical observation (Platts 206).31

31 At this point I would like to refer to a short and by no means exhaustive overview of some of the main tenets in Goethe’s theory which show how different his conceptualisation of colours was from Newton’s and the emphasis he placed on the subjective perception of colours. In his book, Farbenlehre (1810) in which he developed his theory of colours, Goethe distinguished between subjective, subjective/objective and objective colours. More specifically, he distinguished between physiological colours which consist mainly in positive and negative afterimages and which are purely subjective (Burwick 15); then he talked of physical colours which are produced by the process of mediation, and therefore they are both subjective and objective colours (Burwick 16). For example, in dusk or at dawn sunlight is reddish because it passes through a layer of mist; as the sun moves higher in the sky, sunlight becomes more yellow and brighter (Goethe 137). And last, the chemical colors, which are considered objective in the sense that they are qualities of the bodies, e.g. the colour of the plants. However, even these colours vary according to environmental factors like the degrees of light, e.g. the blue of the distant mountains (Burwick 17).

In addition, Goethe formulated three basic laws: the law of polarity, which consists in the opposition between light and darkness and which generates the tension perceived as colour (Burwick 18); the law of gradation, which attributes the transition from one colour to another to the degrees of tension in the polar opposition between light and darkness (Burwick 19); and the law of totality which
Therefore, the main antithesis between Goethe and Newton is a matter of methodology with regard to the issue of subjective as opposed to objective vision. In addition, Goethe was more concerned with perception and not with the natural laws which determine the propagation of light (Burwick 18). However, at this point it is important to clarify that the element of subjectivity was implicit in Newton’s theory as well. In fact, Newton talked about the subjectivity of colours first, recognizing that colour is not an inherent quality of the object that bears it but it is rather a “sensation” in the viewer’s mind. As Newton explains:

… Rays, to speak properly, are not coloured. In them there is nothing else than a certain Power and Disposition to stir up a Sensation of this or that Colour.

(\textit{Opticks} 124-125; also qtd in Burwick 34)

Thus, Newton was the first to make a distinction between the physical aspect of colour, that is, the angle of refraction when a ray passes through a transparent medium, and the sensory phenomenon of colour, that is, the response to refrangibility by the perceiving mind (McEvoy). So, the revolutionary aspect of Newton’s theory was the emphasis he paid to separating the physical and the sensory, that is, the mathematical and the physiological aspects of colour and the fact that he declared that colour is a sensation on the viewer’s mind (McEvoy).

Furthermore, the variety of “subjective” colour phenomena, such as afterimages and strongly coloured shadows, further emphasized the importance of the study of the relationship between the mind and the perception of colour during the eighteenth century (McEvoy). In the afterimages the image is produced entirely by the eye (Zajonc 327). Newton was also interested in the afterimages of the sun and he conducted a series of dangerous experiments, which involved his staring at the sun for
an extended period of time. He noted that after he had stared at the sun for some time with one eye, all coloured objects appeared red, and dark objects looked bluish (Iliffe 34). Therefore, Newton was interested in the interaction of imagination and vision and he studied whether it was possible to train the imagination to see things (Iliffe 34). Newton described these experiments in detail to John Locke in 1691 and to John Conduitt in 1726 telling them that he could still “conjure up an image of the Sun if he put his mind to it” (Iliffe 35). These experiments were reported as subjective experiences, but, as Iliffe explains, Newton’s detailed description of a series of trials still indicated an objective detachment in the methodology of his study (34).32

Therefore, it was Newton’s spirit of scientific, observational detachment which was challenged by Goethe and his methodology. For Goethe, it is one’s personal, lived experience as directly reported by the senses which is necessary for insight (McEvoy). As a result, he avoided reference to optics and light rays, because these concepts related to mathematics and physics, which he called a “scientific coffin” (McEvoy). As Bruce McEvoy explains, in contrast to Newton’s mathematical methodology, Goethe advocated an intuitive analysis of cognitive experience, a holistic method that proceeded from bringing all the perceptual phenomena together, than ordering them in a series of perceptual priority or importance and then perceiving directly in this ordered pattern, a basic experiential truth.

32 We read in Newton’s Opticks his commitment to a mathematical/logic/scientific perspective of studying optical phenomena and his reservation towards Imagination as a method to approach them: Whence it follows, that the colorifick Dispositions of Rays are also connate with them, and immutable; and by consequence, that all the Productions and Appearances of Colours in the World are derived, not from any physical Change caused in Light by Reflection or Reflection, but only from the various Mixtures or Separations of Rays, by virtue of their different Refrangibility or Reflexibility. And in this respect the Science of Colours becomes a Speculation as truly mathematical as any other part of Opticks. I mean, so far as they depend on the Nature of Light, and are not produced or alter’d by the Power of Imagination, or by striking or pressing the Eye. (Opticks 244)
Goethe privileged the subjective process of perception of colour as different and more complete than the limited objective description of experiments with light beams as performed by Newton (Platts 207). For Goethe the lab was within himself, and he developed subjective tools and subjective skills in order to study optical phenomena (Platts 207). Although this process is heretical for a conventional scientist, it developed the viewer’s ability to *imagine*, which is the main skill of a creative mind, and foregrounded a process of internal synthesis, not internal observation, in an attempt to perceive the phenomenon *holistically* (Platts 207).

Goethe’s holistic approach to the optical phenomena is crucial in epistemological terms, since it introduces and privileges intuition as an epistemological tool, as a way of knowing the world. As Platts explains, when consciousness is engaged in holistic perception, it is functioning intuitively, not intellectually (208). Intuition is viewed as a simultaneous perception of the whole and it is contrasted to knowledge which is acquired logically and rationally, and which involves an analysis into discrete elements which are inferentially linked (Platts 208). Although science did not consider intuition positively, Goethe claimed that it was a higher-level activity and mode of thought (Platts 208). So, Goethe privileged intuition as an epistemological tool, as a source of knowledge.

Therefore, in Goethe’s terms the knower is not an onlooker but a participant in nature and its phenomena. The eye is not seen as a passive device but as a creative organ, which “demands completeness and seeks to complete the colour circle in itself” (Zajonc 328). For these experiments Goethe was convinced that one should not remove man from nature during the process of scientific investigation, like Newton, since the distinction between man and nature, observer and observed is not valid because man is part of nature and in constant dialogue, both consciously and
unconsciously, with it (Zajonc 328). According to Zajonc, Goethe’s epistemology consisted in a schooling of intuition. Mere observation of a phenomenon is not sufficient: gradually faculties and abilities arise which lead to a sufficiently refined perception, the result of which is cognition (332).

It is very probable that Charlotte Brontë was familiar with translations of Goethe’s *Faust* and *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Alexander and Smith 55). In addition, Britain’s great painter Turner was influenced by Goethe in his ideas about colour. Turner and Goethe shared common beliefs on the role of science and their common feeling for the detail of colour (Burwick 42). Charlotte Brontë admired Turner’s work. She saw two of his exhibitions in London, in December 1849, and she copied one of Turner’s paintings in print (Alexander and Smith 440). Therefore, Charlotte Brontë was exposed to Goethe’s as well as to Newton’s influence as already mentioned.

So in Brontë’s mature novels, the mind becomes the site where objective and subjective vision develop and interact, and this interaction is reflected in her narratives. Within the enclosed site of the mind as a camera obscura, what starts as the objective vision of a detached viewer is gradually disrupted by subjective vision and narratives of fantasy, developing thus discourses of perception and epistemology alternative to the traditional model of the objective epistemology of scientific detachment. This way, Charlotte Brontë employs Newton’s optical model as an analogy for her representation of the mind as well as her writing which, however, is challenged from within. This new, alternative epistemology is informed by subjective vision, emotion, instinct, fantasy and imagination constructing the perception of the female narrating subject. In this framework, the female educator, who is not involved only in teaching but also in learning, constructs her epistemology in relation to other women by contrasting her epistemological viewpoint to theirs, in a process which
involves their appropriation, even colonization. The female educator who narrates her story and whose consciousness we access (like Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe) uses other women’s epistemic viewpoints to define what she is not. Thus, the enclosed space of the camera obscura of her mind is gradually abolished, revealing the heterogeneity of her subjectivity and her epistemic agency which is reflected in the spectrum of her narrative.

8. Conclusion

The relationship between Newton’s *Opticks* and Charlotte Brontë’s novels, the use of optics as a metaphor in literary terms as well as the epistemological discourse which underlies her work are part of my attempt to contribute to the delineation of a discourse which is present in her work and which touches upon science. This is in line with what Thormälhen describes as the recent endeavour in the field of Brontë studies where:

> experts have long tried to correct the impression that the three surviving Brontë sisters were dreamy geniuses isolated on their faraway moors. Instead, scholars have endeavoured to present them as early-nineteenth century intellectuals with a keen interest in what was happening in the world, in arts, in politics at home and abroad, in philosophy and religion, and at all levels of society—and with very decided professional ambitions.” (*Context 5*)

Charlotte Brontë was acquainted also with aspects of the scientific context of her time such as optics, and assimilated them in her own terms and in her own ways, creating her own narratives. To my knowledge, there are no other works which attempt to draw parallels between Charlotte Brontë’s novels and Newton’s *Opticks* regarding the
fields of narratology and epistemology as well as the subjectivity of the female educator.

As far as issues of epistemology and the representation of the mind in Charlotte Brontë’s work are concerned, there are two works which have been very illuminating and useful for me. The first one is Urlike Walker’s PhD thesis *Performing the Self in Camera: Charlotte Brontë, the Camera Obscura and the Protocols of Female Self-enactment* (1997), which shows that the camera obscura, both as an apparatus and as a metaphor of the mind was dominant throughout the nineteenth century and influenced Brontë’s work. In her work, Walker claims that in the antipodes of the stable and unitary selfhood of the male authority as represented by the paradigm of the Lockean camera obscura, Brontë constructs the female subject as unstable, elusive and defying containment. This happens by means of a performative construction of the female self in the virtual reality of the theatre. In this case, the theatre represents a site of transition where the camera obscura as site of rational vision and cognition gives way to a mind/space where inner dramas, as well as the real and virtual become increasingly interchangeable. She discusses the emergence of the female subject on the margins of male narrative in *The Professor*, then its becoming central in the narrative of *Jane Eyre*, and as especially evasive in female theatrics which is more fully explored in *Villette*. Furthermore, her work has been very helpful as far as the influence of the camera obscura on the nineteenth century and Charlotte Brontë are concerned. I also study the interchange between objective and subjective vision in the framework of the mind as a camera obscura model. However, Walker focuses only on the first-person narratives of Charlotte Brontë, whereas I include *Shirley* in my study. Besides, Urlike Walker elaborates on the aforementioned “theatrical” conceptualization of female selfhood and of the
camera obscura, which although very interesting and illuminating, is something that I do not focus on. Instead, I refer to Newton and the prism and I attempt to study the parallels that can be drawn between Newton’s optical model, Bakhtin’s theory and narratology and how they can be exemplified in Brontë’s texts. Besides, I focus on the profession of the educator and its key role in the representation and the construction of the female subjectivity and epistemology in Charlotte Brontë’s novels. All these issues are out of the scope of Walker’s study.

The second book which refers to discussions of the mind and its representation in Brontë’s work is Rachel Malane’s book *Sex in Mind: The Gendered Brain in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Mental Sciences* (2005). In this book, Malane explores and studies several issues concerning the representation of the mind in the work of Charlotte Brontë. According to Malane, in Brontë’s novels, the female brain is constructed in spatial terms and is depicted as more vulnerable to incursion because of its greater permeability than the male one; it is influenced by external environment and thus culture and this in the end leads to the construction of highly gendered brains. In her argument, male minds are inclined to conquer and subdue female minds. Romantic relationships involve a merging of these gendered spaces/minds as in the case of Jane and Rochester. In my opinion, the representation of the mind in Charlotte Brontë’s novels is not so gender-marked, since female minds can be penetrating too.

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33 More specifically, Urlike Walker focuses on the theatrics of self-enactment within the camera (obscura), which is perceived as a theatrical space. In this space, “reality” is perceived in theatrical terms, namely as virtuality and as an “interiorized interdynamic of spectrality, specularity and self-performance” rather than as a traditional dichotomy of a subject over and against an externally perceived object (U. Walker 15). According to Urlike Walker, Brontë proposes a “performative, metamorphic” female subjectivity which negotiates the boundaries of its containment in a camera (15).

34 For instance, Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, as I would like to show later in my thesis, functions as a ‘penetrator’ of a male mental space, that of M Paul, when she states that: “his mind was indeed my library, and whenever it was opened to me, I entered bliss” (*V* 422). Besides, Lucy describes her love for Truth in a stereotypically masculine way: ‘I always, throughout my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth’ (*V* 564, my italics). So, in these instances, reaching the truth equates penetration, in mental terms, even though the agents who inquire the truth are female.
Regarding the image of the female educator and the educational context of Charlotte Brontë’s era, a very useful book is Marianne Thormählen’s *The Brontës and Education* (2007) as well as the collective work *The Brontës and Education: Papers presented to the Brontë Society Weekend Conference September 2004*. Both these books offer a lot of contextual information regarding issues of education related to the Brontës and their era. These range from skills and subjects taught at home or at school, the educational strategies that educators used to follow in school training, home tutoring and male/female education. They helped me understand the representation of the educator in Brontë’s works, a representation which is fundamental in her writing since the main characters and narrators of her novels are educators of various kinds: William Crimsworth is a tutor and schoolteacher, Jane Eyre is a governess, both Caroline and Shirley work as Sunday school teachers and Lucy Snowe is a schoolteacher and a school directress. Apart from the main characters, all four mature novels by Charlotte Brontë are full of secondary characters who are related to education in one way or another; they are either school owners, governesses, teachers or tutors. Furthermore, Thormählen’s point that the concept of education in all Brontë novels includes both the notion of upbringing and that of knowledge acquisition (1) is fundamental in my discussion of education in Charlotte Brontë’s novels. The main axes concerning the notion of education that I employ in my thesis are (self-) education and epistemology. And taking Thormählen’s definition into consideration, self-education runs parallel to upbringing and the individual’s urge to educate and improve himself/herself, whereas epistemology deals with the question of how people learn, or in Thormählen’s words, “knowledge acquisition.” However, I try to explore this bipolar definition of education in relation to a prismatic model of mental representation and narrative, as well as the model of the mind as a camera
obscura in Charlotte Brontë’s novels. Besides as I argue more extensively later in my thesis, Thormählen’s insightful comment that self-education does not necessarily result in an individual’s successful socialization and harmony with society (4) illuminates the image of the “heterogeneous” woman who in the same way prioritizes the harmony of the individual woman with herself.

The chapters of my thesis follow the chronological order of her novels, since, as I would like to show, there is experimentation on the part of Charlotte Brontë regarding her choices as an author, which indicate her growing maturity. More specifically, in my second chapter in which I discuss her first novel, *The Professor*, I argue that Charlotte Brontë employs a male narrating voice which functions as the prism through which she views, explores and discusses the images of female educators. The very fact that a female author constructs a male narrator underpins the experimental nature of her writing and in a sense reminds the reader of Butler’s discussion of the performative nature of gender, since the author embarks on the project of the construction of an artificial gender for her narrator, as it is different from hers.

The male narrator’s mind is referred to as an enclosed space where the narrating subject, who is a male tutor, passes from an immature state, where he functions as an automaton, to a more mature one. In the beginning of the novel, Crimsworth is in an effeminized, subordinate position as a poor clerk, and this is reflected in the description of his mental state as an automaton. Later in the novel, he decides to change the course of his life and move to Brussels to work as a teacher. This more mature stage of his life is reflected in a new, more mature representation of the mind, as a “four walled cell” and a picture gallery, where the agent performing the mental activity is a viewer looking at the pictures hung on the four walls of this gallery; so the visual element emerges as constitutive of his perception, as the attempt of a more
mature subject to leave behind the immature automaton-like subject. His new job as a tutor invests him with a new type of perception, the “tutor’s way of seeing” which according to the text, can distinguish the real from the ideal; it can have access to what lies beneath the surface, to the back side of the “tapestry hangings” on the four walls of this mental camera obscura. Thus, the tutor’s vision is constructed as a fusion of Newtonian, objective vision and subjective vision, and the blending of these two perspectives forms the “prism” through which contrasting images of female educators, Mlle Reuter and Mlle Henri, are studied. Although Brontë uses a male narrator, she gradually shifts her interest from his image to the images of female educators. Eventually, Mlle Henri emerges from invisibility and suppression, and succeeds both in the public and the private sphere, forming thus a powerful model of female educator, both as a successful schoolteacher and as a school directress.

In my third chapter I argue that in Jane Eyre the mind is represented as a bipartite entity which comprises the site, a camera obscura, and the agent of seeing. Jane’s progress in life is parallel with her progress and movement from one mental space to another, tracing thus an epistemological progress from a subordinate state to an enlightened one. My attempt to uncover an epistemological pattern that explores the ways through which Jane Eyre acquires knowledge begins with the exploration of the novel’s representation of the mind. The representation of the mind in Jane Eyre incorporates aspects of Locke’s camera obscura. Such images of the mind show Jane’s incorporation of a masculine conceptualization of the mind, closely associated with the Enlightenment, which raises gender issues in relation to the mind. The progress in Jane’s mind, which is parallel to her pilgrimage in life, signifies a movement from Superstition to Enlightenment, that is from a feminized, subordinate epistemology towards a masculine, scientific ideal dominant in the eighteenth century.
However, enlightenment for Jane does not entail a total rejection of the traditional female epistemology and an adoption of male epistemologies, but rather the cross-fertilization of the male and female elements of the human mind. This process leads to the construction of new alternative feminine epistemologies, which imply an “enlightened” feminized way to knowing. Jane’s new, more mature epistemology is tested against the epistemic viewpoints of the other female characters in the novel. Jane uses these women in order to learn from them and educate herself, but later they are effaced, fortifying thus Jane’s subjectivity and her epistemic agency.

In the fourth chapter of my thesis I would like to show that in Shirley, multiple points of view in narration, the split main character, as well as references to social issues of her era produce a text which is rather polyphonic. The third-person narrator offers the reader a spectrum of colours in a narrative which is disrupted by multifarious narratives, perspectives and voices. This spectrum reveals a thread of epistemological agency regarding Caroline whose mind we access. In Caroline’s discourse, the representation of the mind, which also develops mainly in terms of the model of the camera obscura, starts from a strictly gendered space and gradually becomes a negotiated site where both objective and subjective vision merge, fantasy narratives develop and discourses of superstition are embedded. In the end, the female mind emerges as a means of female empowerment. Her mind is the means that enables Caroline to supersede her insecurity and inferiority feelings and by means of her mind she gains both the admiration and appreciation of the people close to her. Eventually, in Shirley, the epistemologically empowered female subject emerges in Caroline’s narrative of self-education, through the ‘prismatic’ quality of the literary text.
The camera obscura in *Villette*, as I would like to argue in the fifth chapter of my thesis, becomes the site where the friction between objective and subjective vision takes place. In the beginning of the novel, the detached, objective vision of a marginalized female subject, standing in the periphery of the dark rooms of her mind as well as the dark rooms of the text, silently watching, is gradually challenged by a more subjective and creative type of vision, as the female subject emerges in her own narrative. In the end, the walls of the camera obscura collapse and the borderline between illusion and reality, subjective and objective perception is blurred and cancelled. The implications of the polarity between objectivity and subjectivity, which is the main disparity between Newton and Goethe, form the basis on which epistemology is constructed in *Villette*, as Lucy Snowe resorts to more intuitive ways of knowing the world. The catalyst for this shift in Lucy’s perception is her role as an educator, since it enables her to assume a vantage point, where she can see and be seen. As she develops professionally, she assumes various and different points of vision and perception, which enable her to construct her own subjectivity and perception in more subjective and creative terms. This process of transition from objective to subjective perception is a dialogic process; even when she has resorted to more subjective modes of perception, she returns again to objective modes of perception in order to regulate her subjective vision. In the course of the novel, Lucy’s viewpoint is dialogically contrasted to the ways of seeing of other main characters, those of M Beck, Ginevra, Polly but also that of Dr John and M Paul.

In the end, as I discuss in my last chapter, Lucy’s own visual epistemology and her refractive, dialogic narrative prevails, justifying her agency as a successful school-mistress and showing the experimentation and ambiguity of her perception in an
experimental, almost post-modern ending of her narrative (Kitsi-Mitakou and Despotopoulou 5).

In conclusion, Brontë’s work echoes the influence of Newton’s *Opticks* on many levels. First of all, the treatment of light and colours both in her poetry and in descriptive parts of her prose echoes the influence of Newton’s *Opticks* on eighteenth-century poetry. In addition, the influence of *Opticks* is evident in the representation of the mind as a prism and as a camera obscura and on the epistemological discourse that such a representation entails. The mind is represented as a bipartite entity which includes both the site, the enclosed space of the camera obscura, and the agent of seeing/perceiving which allows for the emergence of the spectrum of the narrative where multiple voices and perspectives interact, subjective and objective vision merge. Thus, the heterogeneity of the female mind, which is full of counter-perspectives and voices, subjective and objective modes of seeing, dislocates the objective, centripetal authority of the masculine viewer of the Lockean camera obscura. The colours of her perception take form in her heterogeneous narrative and help her define herself as a “heterogeneous” (*JE* 15) creature. The enclosure of the camera obscura is challenged by the interaction of the female subject with her social environment, which is made feasible by her profession as an educator, since because of it she is extracted from the obscurity of a domestic enclosure and she can oscillate between visibility and invisibility due to her ambiguous social position. In the spectrum of her narrative, the female educator juxtaposes her mental power and epistemic viewpoint with other women’s, in an attempt to reappropriate them, almost colonize them, in order to define her own perception and subjectivity.
Chapter Two

The Tutor’s Vision and Mind: Distinguishing the Ideal from the Real in *The Professor*

In Charlotte Brontë’s first novel *The Professor*, the narrator, who works as a tutor, progresses both personally and professionally in his life. This progress is reflected textually on representations of his mind which gradually shift from an effeminate, subordinate, automaton-like status to a more mature and elaborate one drawing on the Lockean model of the camera obscura. In this framework, mental activity merges with visual epistemologies, constructing thus a single mental/visual entity, the tutor’s idiosyncratic vision. This penetrating tutor’s vision is formed by the blending of both objective and subjective perspectives and is employed by Brontë in order to explore and discuss femininity, as embodied by contrasting and competing models of female educators. Thus, interest gradually shifts from the narrating male subject and focuses on models of female agency, while it is the male narrator’s voice which mostly qualifies the prism through which these female characters are viewed. In the end, an empowered model of the female educator emerges from invisibility and suppression, and attains success both in the public and the private sphere, introducing thus the “heterogeneous” (*JE* 15) woman, which is later further explored in the figures of Jane Eyre, Caroline, Shirley and Lucy Snowe.

This new proto-feminist image of the “heterogeneous” woman is a multi-layered female figure, behind whose silence and invisibility emerges a centrifugal discourse of anti-patriarchal questioning. She is embodied mainly in the female educator in Brontë’s novels, in a context where education is viewed as a means to ascending socially but mainly to acquiring knowledge, self-education and enlarging
one’s views of life. She is in “discord” (JE 15) with her environment, silent, seemingly compromised but with mental capacity and love for independence and progress not only social but epistemological as well. Her profession as an educator is a nodal point in the development and construction of her heterogeneity, because it detaches her from the restriction of the domestic environment and helps in her dialogic association with a broader social and intellectual context.

In *The Professor* Brontë approaches the heterogeneity of her heroine by focusing on a recurrent issue in her novels, that is, the disparity between illusion and reality, or in her own words, the contrast between the “real” and the “ideal.” Her discussion of issues of vision and seeing develops into a broader discussion of issues related to realism. The inclusion/incorporation of discourses of fantasy, imagination in the narration of reality indicate a new perception of realistic representation, “psychological realism” (Alexander and Smith 261), and a new conceptualization of epistemology, acquisition of knowledge and perception, which includes instinct and intuition. This is expressed in a new experimental narrative which includes fantasy narratives and constructs an experimental proto-feminist figure of female educator.

1. **The Male Narrator of *The Professor***

*The Professor* was the first novel written by Charlotte Brontë and it was published posthumously in 1857. In it, there are the seeds of many of her literary explorations and experimentations that took a clearer form later in her more mature works. The novel starts with an embedded letter of introduction where the main narrator introduces himself, and the first six chapters establish his identity as the weaker of two antagonistic siblings, a poor aristocrat who received a good Eton education
thanks to some relatives’ generosity and is employed in his brother’s business as a clerk.

The choice of the male narrator in *The Professor* is a highly experimental venture on the part of Charlotte Brontë. *The Professor* is one of the few Victorian novels written by women which has a male first person narrator (W. Cohen, *Material Interiority* 444). This peculiar choice on her part echoes the male narrators of her juvenilia, since most of her adolescent writings are narrated by male narrators (Alexander and Smith 280). Besides, the choice of a male narrator and perspective can be seen as a compromise with the market ideology of her time, since at that time the male voice was considered as more representative than the female one (Parkin-Gounelas 54). In addition, as Annette Federico explains, one of Brontë’s major concerns was the issue of power and the male voice appears to facilitate her in her attempt to deal with it, since in the Victorian era the masculine voice was considered as more rational and more objective than the female one (1). Although Crimsworth is not as attractive as Brontë’s later male heroes, she seems to employ him, however weak and powerless he is, because she can associate only maleness with power and authority, and not femaleness (Federico 4). Furthermore, the second issue which interested her was that of femaleness. By adopting a masculine perspective, Brontë had the opportunity to better analyze what really concerned her, that is, female nature (Federico 4). As Gilbert and Gubar explain, by pretending to be a man, Brontë sees the reflection of herself in the eyes of the “crucial and powerful Other” (317). On the whole, Crimsworth was found by contemporary critics as rather dull, aloof and unengaging (Malone 177).  

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35 However, Malone holds the interesting view that the reason for Crimsworth’s dullness may not be that Brontë could not convincingly create a male protagonist, but rather the fact that a male protagonist could not convincingly tell the type of the story Brontë wanted to narrate, that is, a history of suffering (180).
Crimsworth’s experimental nature is revealed in his construction as a blending of centrifugal and centripetal forces, an amalgam of power and powerlessness, a mixture of male and female characteristics. The fact that he has an Eton education, he is offered a choice of professions, he has influential friends who write him letters of recommendation and give him advice on his investments are traits which underscore his masculinity (Federico 6, 7) and empower him. Furthermore, the material conditions of his life are not unbearable, and Federico mentions as an example the event where Crimsworth can walk alone in the streets at night without being harassed by strange men as opposed to a similar incident described in Villette, where Lucy Snowe is chased by two men (7). So, an important difference between Crimsworth and female heroines like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe is that Crimsworth’s masculinity offers him psychological and social advantages (Federico 8). He does possess, at least to some degree, four qualities which define power in Victorian society, and these qualities are education, money, mobility, and autonomy (Newton qtd in Federico 8).

However, especially in the beginning of the novel, Crimsworth is in a disadvantaged position and as Shuttleworth explains, he is almost effeminized (124-127). He appears as a victim of male exploitation, since he is exploited by his maternal uncles and especially by his own brother who even whips him (Federico 8). Mahameed Mohammed goes as far as to describe him as an androgynous figure since he is characterized by several stereotypical female qualities: he is orphaned and disinherited, he often assumes the position of a woman in a male society, subordinate, repressed, economically dependent, and almost non-existent (8).

Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, Crimsworth has achieved an exemplary progress from powerlessness to mastery (Mohammed 8). In spite of his plainness, poverty and solitude, he is never destitute and powerless in the way Brontëan
heroines, like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, are (Parkin-Gounelas 58). Throughout the novel, Crimsworth is able to rely on the privileges of his sex and class (Malone 180) and by the end of the narrative, in a sense, Crimsworth regains his power because he continues to conceal his vulnerability and thinks of his love and sexuality as a gift for his ‘penniless and parentless’ Frances (Federico 13). An important difference between *The Professor* and the rest of the heroes in Brontë’s novels, as Federico holds, is that in *The Professor*, the “feminization” of the hero does not involve his symbolic castration or his killing in a sea voyage, or his submission to a woman’s influence (13) as in the rest of Brontë’s novels.

Therefore, there is ambivalence, friction and tension in the construction of Crimsworth, which stems from the ambivalence of his representation as an amalgam of male and female characteristics. In the study of this ambivalence between maleness and femaleness we should also take into account the discrepancy between the character’s maleness and the femaleness of the female author who created him. Besides, when Brontë wrote about women, she was more “sure of [her] ground” whereas when she had to write in a male voice she had to trust her “intuition and theory” rather than her personal “observation and experience” and that made it more difficult for her (Parkin-Gounelas 54). Therefore, writing in a male voice was experimental and unsettling for Charlotte Brontë.

Brontë’s experimentation with the male voice of the narrator in *The Professor*, leads to the construction of a male main character who experiences a number of inner

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36 Nevertheless, *The Professor* is a particularly useful example of how Brontë handles the male persona, because we can compare it with the two closely related attempts at a similar subject from the female point of view (Parkin-Gounelas 54). As Ruth Parkin-Gounelas explains, *Jane Eyre* was written close to the time of the writing of *The Professor*, and *Villette* is a reworking of the same material as *The Professor* that is based on Charlotte Brontë’s experience at the Pensionate Heger in Brussels (54). Thus, the comparison between these works can lead to conclusions about the changes in the later works when the “façade of masculinity was dropped” (Parkin-Gounelas 54).
splits, conflicts and oppositions. As Shuttleworth explains, there is a fundamental
division between “the male speaking voice who claims interpretative authority and the
shadowy female author who controls and exposes him” and this division leads to a
text which is inherently split (124). As Carl Plasa argues, Crimsworth is a subject who
is necessarily self-divided and his self-control “is simultaneously a mask and a
symptom of” this inner split (13). He recognizes and defines himself on the basis of
oppositions, like English as opposed to continental, sexual probity as opposed to
“Licentiousness,” self against other and all these oppositions are perceived by Plasa as
the objectification of his internal conflicts (13). In this light, his masculinity “is not an
innate, assured masculinity but rather a social and gender identity created and
sustained only through violence: the violence of self-repression and of repudiation of
all who might threaten the carefully nurtured illusion of self-control” (Shuttleworth
132). So Crimsworth’s self-control and self-repression is nothing else than a defense
mechanism to cover for the fact that as a subject he is self-divided, experiencing the
agony of exhibiting a plausible “maleness” that will not expose him. William
Crimsworth embodies both inner conflicts of repression and self-control, as well as
the disjunction between the masculine narrating voice and the female author.

In the beginning of the novel, Crimsworth occupies a subordinate social
position, where he is almost unnoticed and invisible, and this is reflected in his image
as a “desolate tutor or governess” as well as the image of the automaton which defines
his subjectivity and the representation of his mind. On the occasion of a party in his
brother’s house, he describes himself as follows: “I looked weary, solitary, kept down
like some desolate tutor or governess” (P 16). Both images show the difficulty with
which Crimsworth realizes and asserts his masculinity; both titles signify dependence
on a household but they also differ from each other in specifying the sex of the
individual and the element of sexuality which was denied both to the tutor and the
governess as part of their profession (Gezari 39). Both “the desolate tutor” and the
“governess” reflect Crimsworth’s effeminized, subordinate position (Shuttleworth
126). Both images invoke contempt because of their ambiguous social position and
their invisibility in a bourgeois social context; they belonged neither to the upper
middle-class, although they were trusted with the education and the upbringing of
upper-class children, nor were they servants. Peterson employed the term “status
incongruence” to refer to the tension experienced by the governess because of the fact
that she was usually a middle-class lady and therefore not a servant, but at the same
time she was an employee, therefore not of an equal status with the wife and the
daughters of the house where she worked (Peterson 11)—a tension which was also
experienced by the tutor. Crimsworth’s subordinate, feminized position reaches the
point of objectification:

I should have liked … to have freedom and opportunity to show that … I was
not, in short, a block or a piece of furniture, but an acting, thinking, sentient
man. (P 16- my italics)

So, he admits that he wants to rise socially and he “long[s] for liberty” (P 20). He
wants to break free from this claustrophobic situation in which he describes himself as
“a plant growing in humid darkness out of the slimy walls of a well” (P 21). It is Mr
Hunsden, a catalytic character, who confronts him explicitly for the first time and
poses to him the most crucial question37 which the novel attempts to answer:

What are you then? You sit at that desk in Crimsworth’s counting-house day
by day and week by week, scraping with a pen on paper just like an
automaton. You never get up; you never say you are tired; you never ask for a

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37 The same question fuels the action in Villette, where Lucy Snowe is called to answer the very same
question asked by her friend, Ginevra: “Who are you, Miss Snowe?” (V 341)
holiday; you never take change or relaxation; you give way to no excess of an evening; you neither keep wild company nor indulge in strong drink. … I say that when a man endures patiently what ought to be unendurable, he is a fossil.  

(P 25, my italics)

The image of the automaton is an image of dehumanization denoting the destabilization of human agency and the collapse of personal autonomy (Inglis, Becoming Automatous 23). Automata were forms of entertainment as well as symbols of forms of domination, production and control, relative both to the critique and the imposition of discipline (Foucault qtd in Clark, Colinski and Schaffer 47). They raised issues of determinism and human free will, especially in the image of factory workers who ended up “resemble[ing] the very machine they managed” (Schaffer, Enlightened Automata 128, 129). In addition, in the eighteenth century automata were perceived as emblems of subjection and government (Schaffer, Enlightened Automata 128, 129). Therefore, mechanization was a limit to liberty and freedom (Schaffer, Enlightened Automata 152). Human beings were treated as mere objects to be administered and then they would end up consumed by a stark “rational” technological system (Outram 7).

The automaton was also a model of mimesis and regularity which appeared persistently in eighteenth-century conduct literature and social life (Park 1). It developed as an especially evasive symbol which, on the one hand, signified the advancement and progress of human ingenuity but, on the other hand, referred also to

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38 Automata and even less complex speaking machines were popular in England throughout the nineteenth century (Inglis, Becoming Automatous 3). Moreover, as Christopher Cooper argues, the first use of the word ‘automaton’ according to the Oxford Dictionary was in 1611 and by 1796 the word ‘automaton’ was used to describe human beings who acted mechanically in a monotonous routine (3). All three Brontë sisters used the word, although it is not certain that they ever saw a real automaton; Charlotte Brontë uses the word ‘automaton’ three times in Jane Eyre, twice in Shirley and twice in The Professor (Cooper 3).
subjects which were considered as ‘innately’ lacking the potential of advancement but who could be taught to acquire it through mechanical acts of repetition and imitation—such subjects were children, women, animals as well as black people (Park 26). So, the image of the automaton signifies the fossilization of Crimsworth’s potential and capability, aligns him with women and children and thus signifies his feminization.

This amalgam of male and female characteristics which characterizes the narrator of the novel forms the prism through which the reader has access to the story and its characters. It is through the lens of his narration that we see what he sees and perceives. And in the case of The Professor what seems to be of particular interest to Brontë is not only her delving into the private sphere, personality, thoughts and emotions of the male persona of the narrator, but also and maybe mainly the study of images of femaleness, more particularly of the two main protagonists and female educators, Mlle Reuter and Mlle Henri as seen from the perspective of the male narrator. Thus, Crimsworth’s mind and perception form the prism through which our access to such images is made possible, and this prism reveals the heterogeneity of women.

2. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE TUTOR’S MIND IN THE PROFESSOR

The mind of this dehumanized, objectified, effeminized automaton-like subject was represented as a field of tension, an almost schizophrenic image of a split subjectivity framed by two contrasting voices. We read in Crimsworth’s narration:

Thoughts, not varied but strong, occupied my mind. Two voices spoke within me; again and again they uttered the same monotonous phrases. One said,
“William, your life is intolerable.” The other, “what can you do to alter it?” (P 21)

The mind is thus represented as an unidentified enclosed space where thoughts are tenants since they occupy it, and where disembodied voices obsessively and monotonously repeat the same phrase in an automaton-like way. Therefore, the automaton-like subject is defined by an automaton-like mind.

In addition, the perception of this timid and reserved automaton-like subject is further defined by three features. As Crimsworth explains “I was guarded by three faculties—caution, tact, observation” (P 21). As Sally Shuttleworth explains, these three qualities exemplify Crimsworth’s ability to “police internally his own mental traits” and they suggest an “internal regime of surveillance” which encircles his selfhood (Shuttleworth 127). This restricted condition causes Crimsworth’s call for liberty (P 20) and fuels his urge for change and his pursuit of social and mental progress. Furthermore, these “three faculties” indicate the timidity of a frightened subject who feels threatened by the tyranny of the elder brother and needs to be cautious and observing. The whole novel traces the transformation of this automaton-like subject into “an acting, thinking, sentient man” (P 16). This progress takes place because Crimsworth practices these faculties and especially his faculty of vision/observation. As he meets people who become influential in his life and establishes a dialogic relation with his social environment, he gradually accomplishes his goals and becomes more self-conscious and self-confident. As he does so, his guardian faculties of tact and caution withdraw whereas his faculty of observation is reinforced.

Thus, when Crimsworth manages to disentangle himself from the state of passivity and automatization and decides to move to Brussels and change the route of
his life, the unidentified, enclosed space of his mind is transformed clearly into a “four-walled cell” which reminds us of the camera obscura and the Lockean representation of the mind as a bipartite entity which comprises a site and an agent. According to William Walker and his reading of the metaphors of the mind in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the basic metaphor used by Locke is that of the mind as a bipartite entity which comprises both the site and the agent of perception. This model is the basis for various metaphors used by Locke, such as the mind as a camera obscura, or a dark chamber, where the perceiving agent either views or collects or owns furniture items/ideas, or the mind as a site of socio-erotic activity where the agent “entertains” or “embraces” women/ideas. In *The Professor*, his new, mature representation of the mind comprises an enclosed space, more specifically a picture gallery, and the agent performing the mental activity is a viewer looking at the pictures hung on the walls of this gallery:

Three—nay, four pictures line the four-walled cell where are stored for me the records of the past. First, Eton. All in that picture is in far perspective, receding, diminutive, but freshly coloured … second, X ____, huge, dingy; the canvas cracked and smoked, a yellow sky, sooty clouds … Third, Belgium; and I will pause before this landscape. As to the fourth, a curtain covers it, which I may hereafter withdraw, or may not, as suits my convenience and capacity. (P 39)

The events of the narrative are translated into mental pictures hung on the four walls of the mental chamber and seen by an observer. So, the visual element emerges as constitutive of mental action and perception, signalling the more mature subject’s attempt to leave behind the immature automaton-like subject who monotonously

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39 For the Lockean representation of the mind see also William Walker’s *Locke, Literary Criticism and Philosophy*. 
repeats itself, and progress into a more mature and complex perception and representation of the mind as a bipartite entity including a camera obscura and a viewer.

In addition, the representation of the mind as an enclosed space introduces and reinforces the educator’s interiority, the self as contained.\textsuperscript{40} William Cohen talks of interiority in the sense that human subjects are contained in their bodies and that bodies serve as “vehicles or containers for invisible spiritual, psychological or mental contents” (W. Cohen, \textit{Material Interiority} 445). According to Cohen, Brontë both emphasizes and disrupts the idea of the body as container of the self (W. Cohen, \textit{Material Interiority} 448). The enclosed self, through activities like attending school or falling in love, experiences changes in the mind and heart, and thus the interior is reached through sensory vehicles (W. Cohen, \textit{Material Interiority} 448). On the one hand, Crimsworth seems to enclose himself inside his body/container and on the other hand, his teaching (like another kind of lovemaking) is based on exchange and communication.

As far as the representation of the mind in Charlotte Brontë’s novels is concerned, Rachel Malane also argues that there is a spatial representation of the mind. The characters’ minds are represented as spaces within boundaries which are highly gendered; in this framework, male minds are inclined to conquer and subdue female minds. Romantic relationships involve a merging of these gendered spaces/minds as in the case of Jane Eyre and Rochester. However, in \textit{The Professor} which is the first of her novels, Crimsworth serves the ideal of the self-controlled, self-sufficient and self-confined man who is anxious to preserve the boundaries of his mental space. The result of this self-confinement was Crimsworth’s alienation from

\textsuperscript{40} See also William Cohen’s second chapter, entitled “Self: Material Interiority in Dickens and Brontë” in his book \textit{Embodied}.
his companion, Mlle Henri, and his failure to reach the mental merging with his wife, a mental merging between couples which was presented in the rest of Brontë’s novels, as Malane holds (104-106). However, in the end of the novel, Crimsworth admits that it is “France’s mental points [that] had been the first to interest me, and they still retained the strongest hold on my preference” (P 169). So, I would like to argue that in Charlotte Brontë’s novels the mind is not so gender-marked, since female minds like Mlle Henri’s can be conquering, interesting and attractive as in the aforementioned example.

Furthermore, the visual element of his perception is further underlined by Crimsworth when he identifies memories and thoughts as nightmarish mental pictures:

Belgium! I repeat the word now as I sit alone near midnight. It stirs my world of the past like a summons to resurrection. The graves unclove, the dead are raised; thoughts, feelings, memories that slept are seen by me ascending from the clods, haloed most of them; but while I gaze on their vapoury forms, and strive to ascertain definitely their outline, the sound which wakened them dies, and they sink, each and all, like a light wreath of mist, absorbed in the mould, recalled to urns, resealed in monuments. Farewell, luminous phantoms! (P 39, my italics)

This description of thoughts and memories as phantoms, underscores the subjective element of Crimsworth’s vision, where inner and outer world merge. Imagination is not excluded from his perception and discourse. Brontë in her first novel, and more intensely in the following ones, does not seem willing to regulate subjective vision. Instead she uses subjective vision, fantasy and imagination to render what cannot be expressed in conventional ways under the imperative of reason and objective
perception, and to question the limits of vision and perception as well as the limits of realism.

Therefore, mental processes are viewed in a setting where Lockean representations of the mind merge with visual epistemologies, forming thus a mental/visual entity. This visual/mental entity of perception characterizes the educator and the novel explores the ways in which it is trained in order to tell the difference between illusion and reality, the real and the ideal. This process is a profoundly educational process which educates the tutor and his perception. Education, for our purposes is considered in its wider sense of mental growth, as defining the Romantic ethos, namely the development of the perfected, totalized individual (Richardson 6). So, the image of the automaton represents the “fossilization” of the potential, wishes and ambitions of Crimsworth as well as his feminization and incapacity to advance. This starting point is challenged and reversed in the course of the novel. Such an automaton/fossil-subject as Crimsworth appears to be in the beginning of the novel, needs to be dragged out from inertia and obscurity in order to advance in life, and to do so, he needs to educate both his mind and vision in new ways of perception of the world around him. This education, of both his mind and vision, as well as the consequent advancement in life is what we witness, as the plot of the novel unravels and a dialogic relationship with his environment is established, leading to the construction of the tutor’s vision which distinguishes the real from the ideal.
3. Viewing the Educational Reality from the Tutor’s Perspective

It is his quest for “liberty” (P 20) which motivates Crimsworth to move to Belgium. There he takes on a post as an English teacher in a private school, the Pensionnat Pelet. In his former situation, a good Eton education did not serve him to rise socially; it was an asset which ensured him the humble position of a clerk, with the tedious duties of copying and translating business letters like an automaton. However, gradually the novel’s approach to education is revised. Although education establishes and reinforces an already established social order (Richardson 26), Brontë undermines this notion since education in her novels becomes the vehicle for social rising. Besides, for Brontë an individual has got a duty to improve himself by means of self-education, and as Thormählen notices, the end of this self-education does not bring him in harmony with society, but rather in harmony with himself, including spiritual and imaginative-creative aspects (Brontës and Education 4). So, in Brontë novels, education was a factor of vital importance for the social advancement of the heroine, and a fundamental quest on the part of the heroine. For instance in Shirley,

41 The Belgian settings in The Professor and in Villette reflect Brontë’s concern with the clash between British and French values and the significance of Belgium to British national identity (Longmuir 187). As Longmuir explains, Belgium is the site of the decisive victory over the French in Waterloo; it is often described as “the little Britain on the continent” in texts of that time and epitomizes the conflict between British and French values as well as the possibility of their reconciliation (187). It is also the site where the characters of her novels experience moments of self-conscious identification with their national identity; Belgium represents a space in which Brontë’s characters can reimagine Britishness (Longmuir 187). Thus, Belgium occupies an ambiguous position, and is for Crimsworth a new place of liberty, exploration and self-discovery, where he doesn’t denounce his Englishness.

42 Education is widely recognized as the key method to cultural colonization (Longmuir 180). Both Crimsworth and Lucy Snowe are teachers of English and they appear to try to instill British values in their foreign pupils, so English and French represent also different value systems (Longmuir 181). French is associated with corruption whereas English with honesty, discipline and self-control (Longmuir 181). However, Longmuir notices that Brontë seems quite ambivalent in her attitude towards British and French values since she uses extensively the French language in her novels with no translation (181). Thus, she seems to ambiguously oscillate between being repelled as well as fascinated by non-Englishness, Belgium and the French language.
Caroline, one of the two main female characters, asks herself: “What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world? (S 174)” and the whole journey of self-exploration and self-education that unfolds in the novel attempts to propose an answer to such a fundamental question. Education and knowledge form a part of the identity of the female heroine in Brontë’s novels and particular significance is drawn on the mental capacities and power of the mind of the female heroine. For example, in Jane Eyre, Jane’s mind is her “treasure” (JE 301) which is precious for Rochester and their communication is a communication between their minds (JE 143). And Jane declares that she appreciates “communication with strong, discreet, and refined minds, either male or female” (JE 374) stressing thus the profound interest in knowledge and serious non-superficial communication between individuals.

While Crimsworth describes his first experiences as a teacher in this new environment, and in his attempt to find his own voice as an educator, he employs the examples of two other educators/school owners, first M Pelet and then Mlle Reuter. By comparing and contrasting himself with them, who are considered respectable and successful school-owners, he establishes his own identity and his own perspective on educational reality and life as a professional educator. His acquaintance with both educators initially reveals his lack of a penetrating vision because in both cases his first impressions of these teachers are faulty.

In the beginning and in his first references to the headmaster and the headmistress, his vision is rather reflective than penetrating. It reflects a surface projection of their image as successful, respectable teachers and headmasters, an image which is later subverted. M Pelet was “a man of pleasing and regular features” (P 44), “his physiognomy was fine et spirituelle” (P 45), a headmaster who was intelligent, mild, gentle but also an effective leader and teacher since in his presence
“a profound silence reigned on all sides, and if by chance a murmur or a whisper arose, one glance from the pensive eye of this most gentle pedagogue stilled it instantly” (P 45). Crimsworth respected and admired him, and the two men developed a warm and friendly relationship. M Pelet functioned as a new model of a man of authority counterbalancing the crude and inhumane behaviour of Crimsworth’s former employer and elder brother. Under his influence, Crimsworth performs his first lessons in a classroom and by following his example he establishes his reputation as a good teacher.

However, Brontë shows that she is more interested in exploring female models of effective educational leadership. Her interest soon shifts from the headmaster to the headmistress of the nearby school. Crimsworth is fascinated by the gifted headmistress of the adjoining Pensionnat, Mlle Reuter. And when a job is offered to him to teach some afternoon classes in her school, he gradually shifts his interest from M Pelet to Mlle Reuter’s figure and personality. Thus, in the framework of a romance developing between Crimsworth and Mlle Reuter, the narrator is given the opportunity to “study” the character of the successful headmistress, and to resort to an elaborate analysis of the image and psyche of a female educator who is not a marginalized and invisible governess or school-teacher, but an efficient, respectable and capable schoolmistress, an ambitious woman who is able to succeed in a post of management and leadership in an educational institution.

Soon the reader realizes that Mlle Reuter is a complicated figure, who voices both centripetal and centrifugal discourses. Initially Brontë constructs her as a centrifugal figure, financially independent and with the potential to articulate a discourse distanced from patriarchy and able to embody a new type of woman who challenges the traditional Victorian ideal of the woman-angel in the house. Reuter is
represented initially as a shrewd, dynamic, powerful female educator who manages to ascend the ladder of educational leadership, and successfully manage her own private school. Mlle Reuter is a woman who charms and almost seduces Crimsworth (*P* 77) and who bore “personal as well as mental advantages” (*P* 76) in comparison with her teacher-employees. Her eye was “astute, penetrating, practical” (*P* 64). As Crimsworth says, she has a “business talent” (*P* 58), a talent which was evident in her eyes since “solicitude and business were in her eye, in her forehead” (*P* 59). She bears almost male characteristics since she is described by Crimsworth with particularly masculine characterizations such as “skilful architect” (*P* 68) “politician” (*P* 64) and “wary general” (*P* 54), underscoring thus an almost androgynous aspect of her persona. She is not a victim of her sentimentality, but rather uses her charms to seduce Crismworth and thus accomplish her purposes. So, initially Mlle Reuter appears as a centrifugal female figure, who challenges the norms that define the domestic role of the Victorian woman. She is a dynamic, successful, crafty businesswoman, intelligent and charming. However, this proves to be a mask which demands deciphering:

> At the moment I turned her countenance looked hard, dark, and inquisitive; her eyes were bent upon me with an expression of almost hungry curiosity. I had scarcely caught this phase of physiognomy ere it had vanished; a bland smile played on her features. (*P* 112)

It is the tutor’s vision which permits Crimsworth to “read her [Mlle Reuter’s] real nature” (*P* 114). It is his penetrating vision which enables him to realize the disparity between Mlle Reuter’s surface image/mask of the respectable directress and her real character and intentions.

> It is this mask, the fake identity of Mlle Reuter which initially misguides Crimsworth and forces him to select strategies so as uncover reality behind illusory
appearances. In his attempt to distinguish the real Reuter from the illusory one, he lets the reader hear the centripetal discourses which are voiced by her. From Reuter’s viewpoint, a poor, shy woman like Henri should be left alone in her invisibility, marginalized and her ambition to earn a living outside home should be ignored. Mlle Reuter aligns herself with the patriarchal, centripetal discourse that derides female mental capacity and claims that shy Henri should be “kept down” rather than “brought about” and she “should not be stimulated to aspire after applause and publicity” (P 111). But the most blatant statement that voices patriarchal, centripetal discourse is Reuter’s stance that “ambition, especially literary ambition” is something that should not be “cherished in the mind of a woman” (P 111). Such a position which is stifling for the potential, creativity and literary ambition of a woman was experienced by Brontë herself. Almost a decade before writing *The Professor*, Southey had admonished Charlotte Brontë that literature could not be the business of a woman’s life and it ought not to be (Davies 83). So, it is vital for Brontë to reject Reuter by the end of the novel, so as to undermine and weaken such discourse and ridicule such ideas.

Gradually Crimsworth discovers other layers of Reuter’s identity behind the surface image of the respectable, efficient and successful headmistress. The evasiveness of her nature is described by M Pelet when he prompts Crimsworth to “observe” Mlle Reuter while she is knitting; “Her humble, feminine mind is wholly with her knitting; none of her features move …” (P 68). However, this is only the surface image of reticence and retreat. In fact, calculation lurks under this surface behaviour and this is revealed in her eyes:
“And then,” continued M Pelet, “the eyelid will flicker, the light-coloured lashes be lifted a second, and a blue eye, glancing out under the screen, will take its brief, sly, searching survey, and retreat again.” (P 68)

In this description, the initial image of the headmistress is gradually deconstructed, and the reader is provided with an insight to her inner self. In the description of the vigilant figure of Mlle Reuter who is outwardly quiet as she is knitting, Stevie Davies comments that Charlotte Brontë’s writing achieves an experimental, proto-modernist, quality (Davies 78). In this description, the eye is almost disembodied, extracted from the body.

Interestingly Brontë describes the same incident from another point of view, that of Mlle Reuter. Her subtle ways are almost confessed by her in a revision of her pretense of knitting, which was commented on by M Pelet, giving now her own interpretation and narrating them from her own perspective:

“I like, monsieur, to take my knitting in my hands, and to sit quietly down in my chair. Circumstances defile past me. I watch their march. So long as they follow their course I wish, I say nothing and do nothing. … But when events fall out ill—when circumstances become adverse—I watch very vigilantly. I knit on still, and still I hold my tongue; but every now and then, monsieur, I just put my toe out—so—and give the rebellious circumstance a little secret push, without noise; which sends it the way I wish, and I am successful after all, and nobody has seen my expedient.” (P 115)

Therefore, behind the image of the silent, peaceful and compromised directress who “minds her knitting” (P 115), lurks a dexterous and manipulative woman who is handling people and situations around her according to her own interests. This model of femininity and this image of the female educator and female director are introduced
only to be challenged later by the image of Mlle Henri. Mlle Reuter is Mlle Henri’s role model because she embodies everything that Mlle Henri wishes to become in her life: “a mistress of herself and of a school” (Gezari 49). But at the same time, Mlle Reuter is an obstacle for Mlle Henri because she wants to keep her “isolated as a Protestant, subordinate as a teacher of lace-mending and separated from the man she loves” (Gezari 49). From the competition between these two models of female agency it is Mlle Henri who emerges victorious as she succeeds both in her personal and her professional life, and represents a version of femininity vindicated in the novel.

4. THE TUTOR’S IDIOSYNCRATIC PERSPECTIVE AND VISION: DISTINGUISHING THE “REAL” FROM THE “IDEAL”

In his attempt to reach the depth of Reuter’s psyche, Crimsworth reaches more general conclusions regarding the “female character.” As he admits, he “found [the female character] to be a palpable substance enough—very hard sometimes, and often heavy. There was metal in it, both lead and iron” (P 70). So, femininity or “the female character” is something elusive and evading, consisting of “something vague, slight, gauzy, glittering” (P 70) on the surface, but which (under scrutiny and experience) withdraws to reveal a metallic substance. In Crimsworth’s words, the image of the automaton emerges again, this time in relation to femininity. It qualifies the woman who is full of contrasts, combining the fragile, gauzy surface with a hard, metal substance. This combination of sensitivity and endurance characterizes the female educator and more specifically, the headmistress. But at the same time, the process of uncovering the real nature of femininity by means of observing the headmistress, gives Crimsworth the opportunity to educate his own vision and observation and to
develop a new penetrating type of seeing, idiosyncratic to the educator. In this framework, the tutor functions as an observer, and Brontë endows him with a specific point of view and perspective which is strictly mental:

He [the tutor] finds her [the pupil] in the schoolroom, plainly dressed, with books before her. Owing to her education or her nature, books are to her a nuisance, and she opens them with aversion; yet the teacher must instill into her mind the contents of these books. The mind resists the admission of grave information; it recoils, it grows restive. (P 87, my italics)

The tutor addresses the pupil’s mind, and the mind appears in Lockean terms as a container, as a storeroom where the contents of a book are items to be stored, instilled into this mental space.

Crimsworth reaches “the real” Mlle Reuter and feels her cold metal substance, when he accidentally finds out that M Pelet and Mlle Reuter are in fact a couple (P 79-81) and that Mlle Reuter was trying to seduce him for her own purposes. Furthermore, Pelet’s surface image of the respectable headmaster is undermined when he returns to the Pensionnat drunken, misbehaving and accusing Crimsworth out of jealousy. These two incidents as well as the way he sees his own pupils and the relevant commentary by Crimsworth provide him with the opportunity to refer to and exemplify his own mode of seeing things, a type of vision which is idiosyncratic for the “tutor” and which is described below:

In short, to the tutor, female youth, female charms, are like tapestry hangings of which the wrong side is continually turned towards him; and even when he sees the smooth, external surface, he so well knows what knots, long stitches, and jagged ends are behind that he has scarce a temptation to admire too fondly the seemly forms and bright colours exposed to general view. (P 88)
In a representation of the mind which is Lockean, that is, a representation of the mind as a chamber with tapestry hangings, the tutor’s penetrating vision emerges as being able to distinguish the ideal from the real, and to reach the truth. It is an idiosyncratic mode of seeing, which is valid exclusively to teachers and involves “looking behind the stitches,” beneath the surface, and penetrating into the truth. The teacher sees beneath the surface, and can detect all the faults and real weaknesses of his pupils. This penetrating vision is Brontë’s dominant metaphor for access to human interiority (Cohen William 458). It is also interesting that this type of vision is defined in terms of tapestry and stitching, a particularly feminine imagery, as it is associated with a female activity.

Thus, in The Professor, Brontë poses the intriguing dichotomy between the “real” and the “ideal,” experimenting with the concept of realism. William Crimsworth manages to develop the tutor’s ways of seeing, which is able to distinguish the ideal from the real. With the occasion of his questions on “the female character” the ideal is conceptualized as vague, gauzy and glittering as opposed to the hard, heavy, lead and iron of reality. However, realism and idealism are not always opposites but as Levine says “realism has always tended to contain (in both sense of the word) idealism of some sort” (Realism Reconsidered 16):

The more strenuously empiricism pushes against an epistemology that makes ideas more real than matter, that insists on (divinely) inherited knowledge, that gives first place to intuition and imagination, the more clear it becomes that

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43 Shuttleworth points out that Crimsworth’s penetrating vision, as soon as he assumes the position of the tutor, is part of his identity as a “master” and his success in mastering the sexuality of the Belgium schoolgirls; from his position as their “master,” he looks beneath the “representational surface” and unveils their “animal sexuality which lurks below” (Shuttleworth 130).

44 Jennifer Ruth focuses on the fact that the underside of the tapestry indicates also the cost of its production, the hard work and the material needed. It is this side of labour that Crimsworth occupies (Ruth 289).
realism always depends, more or less surreptitiously, on the mind as much as on “external nature.” Perhaps ironically, therefore, realism has always tended to contain (in both senses of the word) idealism of some form or other, threatening to slide into what emerged in the late nineteenth century as an almost absolute solipsism, Walter Pater’s thick wall of personality through which no real voice ever pierces. “Experience,” it turns out, is always of one’s sensations, not of the things out there that supposedly trigger them. The external is really internal, and realism’s increasing turn to interiority, to throwing the drama inside, as Henry James put it, is almost an epistemological inevitability. (Levine, Realism Reconsidered 16)

Thus, fantasy narratives and subjective perception are introduced into the discussion of realism, and signal Brontë’s interest in internal realism or what is termed as “psychological realism” (Alexander and Smith 261). Such an approach as Levine described above, turns the interest on the mind, and poses questions of epistemology, which initially foregrounds but later overcomes visual epistemologies and encompasses forms of knowledge which are acquired by intuition and imagination and are expressed in fantasy narratives.

Crimsworth’s sentimental education exemplifies the educational power of instinct. In the end of the novel, Crimsworth is educated in romance and love by yielding to emotions by impulse:

There are impulses we can control, but there are others which can control us, because they attain us with a tiger leap, and are our masters ere we have seen them. Perhaps, though, such impulses are seldom altogether bad; Reason, by a process as brief as quiet, a process that is finished ere felt, has ascertained the sanity of the deed Instinct meditates, and feels justified in remaining passive
while it is performed. I know I did not reason, I did not plan or intend, yet, whereas one moment I was sitting solus on the chair near the table, the next, I held Frances on my knee, placed there with sharpness and decision, and retained with exceeding tenacity. (*P* 165)

So, impulse and instinct are foregrounded as an epistemological and educational tool which facilitates and results in Crimsworth’s education in love and romance. Although he claims that a tutor does not see romantically anyone of his pupils, in fact he falls in love and marries a pupil and this pattern is repeated in Brontë’s later novels.

Instinct as an epistemological tool in the reception and comprehension of books is also explored in relation to Mlle Henri. Crimsworth praises Henri’s instinct which “instantly penetrated and possessed the meaning of more ardent and imaginative writers” (*P* 188). Of course we should note that it is a woman’s understanding and reception of literary texts which is guided by instinct and not a man’s.

Therefore, the tutor’s vision is one of the discourses which underpin the network of optical discourses in *The Professor*. The formation of the prism of his narration is the exploration of his vision and the epistemology that the tutor’s vision entails. In *The Professor*, vision is an important issue and aspects and explorations of ways of seeing, like espionage and panopticism, which are further discussed and explored in the rest of Brontë’s novels, are introduced in this novel. As Stevie Davies explains, *The Professor* is a novel which abounds in “optical interactions” and “optical battles” (78). The network of relationships among the people in the private schools of the novel is developed and constructed on “espionage and counterespionage” (Davies 77):
Suspicion and watchfulness prevail, and the field of vision is electric with aghast surmise and calculating, predatory watchfulness. Faces are masks. Eyes are weapons which seek out one’s weak point, to ‘get in.’ (Davies 77)

So, the novel focuses on the interactions of people’s eyes in social situations, where they guard inner secrets and defend these inner territories from the attempts of invaders (Davies 77-78). The eyes are not only means of perception but they are means of control, involved in optical battles like the ones between Crimsworth and Mlle Reuter (Davies 78). As Davies comments, “the watcher is watched, and knows herself watched: she in turn observes the watcher of her watchfulness” (78). Thus, the text abounds in “coded dramas of optical interactions” which are not explicit and outspoken, but co-exist with a “preoccupation with withholding and guardedness” which contribute in the “chronic and acute” repression and strain from which the protagonist suffers (Davies 78).

In this framework of optical battles where the eyes are both means of perception as well as means of control, vision is important. Vision and ways of seeing in *The Professor* tackle issues of objective and subjective vision. Initially, Crimsworth’s vision takes the form of a scientific optical device which claims for itself access to the real and to an objective reality. As Plasa explains, Crimsworth in his phrase: “I record what I have seen” (P 71), claims for himself scientific and empirical objectivity (16). Thus, the male voice of the narrator merges with his masculine vision which is self-defined in a traditionally stereotypical framework which associates masculinity with scientific and empirical objectivity. Crimsworth’s vision is thus an objective vision which transforms into a prism through which the heterogeneous versions of femininity, (as embodied in the images of the various pupils of the pensionat), are objects to be studied or “specimens” as he himself terms
them. They are the objects of a teacher’s study, from the panopticon of his estrade, from which he adopts an advantageous point of perception where he can “glance over” the long ranges of desks and he can have “under his eye” the various female students, forming thus the idiosyncratic tutor’s vision, which will be analyzed later in this chapter:

Daily, as I continued my attendance at the seminary of Mlle. Reuter, did I find fresh occasions to compare the ideal with the real. What had I known of female character previously to my arrival at Brussels? Precious little. And what was my notion of it? Something vague, slight, gauzy, glittering; now when I came in contact with it I found it to be a palpable substance enough; very hard too sometimes, and often heavy; there was metal in it, both lead and iron. Let the idealists, the dreamers about earthly angel and human flowers, just look here while I open my portfolio and show them a sketch or two, pencilled after nature. I took these sketches in the second-class schoolroom of Mlle. Reuter's establishment, where about a hundred specimens of the genus "jeune fille" collected together, offered a fertile variety of subject. A miscellaneous assortment they were, differing both in caste and country; as I sat on my estrade and glanced over the long range of desks, I had under my eye French, English, Belgians, Austrians, and Prussians. (P 70, my italics)

The object of the tutor’s gaze is the heterogeneity of femaleness. Various examples of women are offered by his students, who are the “specimens” of the study under the scrutiny of an almost scientific, masculine, objective gaze of the male teacher who views them from a literally advantageous point of view, that of the “estrade.” The scientific detachment that qualifies the tutor’s way of seeing is further stressed by Crimsworth when he describes his watching of Reuter within the framework of an
“experiment.” As he confesses to his reader: “it would be a man’s while to try the experiment. Tomorrow I will renew my observations” (P 79). So, observing a woman is part of an experiment involving the objective vision of a male tutor/subject. His diction conveys an authoritative, patriarchal discourse, where the superiority of the male tutor/master dominates the female students and teachers who are objectified as “specimens,” parts of an experiment. However, the objective vision of the male tutor who examines, with almost scientific detachment, the objects of his interest is challenged by subjective modes of vision.

In Crimsworth’s narrative, the tutor focuses on reality, on penetrating behind the surface, on seeing the unseen, on reaching the constitutive elements of the whole, on accessing the faults and weaknesses of the “seemly forms and bright colours exposed to general view” (P 88). However, the tutor is not the cold scientist who objectively and dispassionately reaches the truth. Crimsworth admits that “our likings are regulated by our circumstances” (P 88), thus advocating the existence of multiple truths according to many viewpoints and different circumstances which determine our likings, opinions, perception. There are various opinions according to various standpoints; he refers, for example, to the viewpoint of the artist, the engineer or the fashionable young man. The tutor is “blind” to certain qualities like beauty and he sees and appreciates other qualities, mainly “certain mental qualities: application, love of knowledge, natural capacity, docility, truthfulness, gratefulness ...” (P 88). So, the tutor can have access to inner layers of the human psyche and the power of his vision consists in its being able to access the real and deconstruct the ideal. And this happens when the tutor, from his idiosyncratic point of view, combines both objective, penetrating vision and subjective, mental vision.
This subjective vision is exemplified in fantasy narratives which are embedded in the narrative, like the aforementioned excerpt of the “vapoury forms” (P 39) of his memories which evolve in front of his eyes. Another example of Crimsworth narrative of fantasy is the following:

There is a climax to everything, to every state of feeling as well as to every position in life. I turned this truism over in my mind as, in the frosty dawn of a January morning …. I went on thinking, and still the theme of my thoughts was the "climax." Self-dissatisfaction troubled exceedingly the current of my meditations.

"Come, William Crimsworth," said my conscience, or whatever it is that within ourselves takes ourselves to task—"come, get a clear notion of what you would have, or what you would not have. You talk of a climax; pray has your endurance reached its climax? It is not four months old. What a fine resolute fellow you imagined yourself to be when you told Tynedale you would tread in your father's steps, and a pretty treading you are likely to make of it! How well you like X——! Just at this moment how redolent of pleasant associations are its streets, its shops, its warehouses, its factories! How the prospect of this day cheers you! Letter-copying till noon, solitary dinner at your lodgings, letter-copying till evening, solitude … Hello, Crimsworth! where are your thoughts tending? You leave the recollection of Hunsden as a bee would a rock, as a bird a desert; and your aspirations spread eager wings towards a land of visions where, now in advancing daylight—in X——daylight—you dare to dream of congeniality, repose, union. Those three you will never meet in this world; they are angels. The souls of just men made
perfect may encounter them in heaven, but your soul will never be made perfect. Eight o'clock strikes! your hands are thawed, get to work!"

"Work? why should I work?" said I sullenly: "I cannot please though I toil like a slave." "Work, work!" reiterated the inward voice. "I may work, it will do no good," I growled; but nevertheless I drew out a packet of letters and commenced my task—task thankless and bitter as that of the Israelite crawling over the sun-baked fields of Egypt in search of straw and stubble wherewith to accomplish his tale of bricks. (P 28)

Thus the narrative of fantasy is employed in this case in order to establish multivoicedness and expand on another level that of inner voices and inward self-exploration. Crimsworth develops a dialogic relation with himself, in a manner that demands the personification of a second voice which criticizes him. Thus, this technique establishes dialogism inside Crimsworth, stressing the inner split of his subjectivity. In this particular instance the dialogue hints at the issue of self-help and social advancement. It expresses the agony of the subject to extricate himself from stagnation, to explore the limits of his abilities or in his words the “climax” of his “endurance.” This is an important issue in relation to the development of the story and the ethos of self-exploration that this novel advocates.

The merging of objective and subjective vision leads to the fundamental discussion of this novel which is the distinction between the “real” and the “ideal.” It poses questions on realism, complicating thus the concept of realism in a way which is idiosyncratic for Brontë: realism encompasses fantasy as a means to expressing perception and issues of subjective reality and “psychological realism.” At the same time, it involves an idiosyncratic epistemology, which initially is visual and demands an objective perception expressed by the male voice, but on a second level it
encompasses intuition and imagination. The object of perception is the heterogeneity of femaleness, as embodied in the female educators, Mlle Reuter and Mlle Henri.

5. STUDYING THE “HETEROGENEOUS” WOMAN

Crimsworth’s discussion and exploration of femaleness is not confined to his female pupils. Rather, his study of femaleness extends and focuses on the protagonists of a more personal and private sphere. Thus, the tutor’s vision and therefore Crimsworth’s prism help the reader distinguish the real from the ideal, reality from illusion, regarding versions of femaleness, as embodied in the images of the two female teachers: Mlle Reuter and Mlle Henri. Mlle Reuter’s image is gradually decomposed and debunked, whereas Mlle Henri emerges as the image of a woman, both real and ideal and not illusory and deceptive:

I loved the movement with which [Mlle Henri] confided her hand to my hand; I loved her as she stood there, penniless and parentless; for a sensualist charmless, for me a treasure—my best object of sympathy on earth, thinking such thoughts as I thought, feeling such feelings as I felt; my ideal of the shrine in which to seal my stores of love; personification of discretion and forethought, of diligence and perseverance, of self-denial and self-control—those guardians, those trusty keepers of the gift I longed to confer on her—the gift of all my affections; model of truth and honour, of independence and conscientiousness—those refiners and sustainers of an honest life; silent possessor of a well of tenderness, of a flame, as genial as still, as pure as quenchless, of natural feeling, natural passion—those sources of refreshment and comfort to the sanctuary of home. I knew how quietly and how deeply the
well bubbled in her heart; I knew how the more dangerous flame burned safely under the eye of reason; I had seen when the fire shot up a moment high and vivid, when the accelerated heat troubled life's current in its channels; I had seen reason reduce the rebel, and humble its blaze to embers. (P 124-125, my italics)

The tutor’s viewpoint and his prism through which he and the reader perceive the world assert access to objective reality with self-confidence but at the same time this viewpoint is involved in a dialectic relationship with a strong element of subjectivity, associated with the idiosyncratic tutor’s perspective. Thus, despite the claim to an objective truth, the subjectivity of vision emerges as a defining factor of the representation and conceptualization of reality itself. As George Levine argues, realism enacts “the struggle to see from somebody else’s point of view” and this self-consciousness about the impossibility of impersonality compromises the attempt at objectivity in fiction (Levine qtd in Despotopoulou and Kitsi-Mitakou 3). It is realist writers themselves who often challenge the illusion of reality in their fiction (Despotopoulou and Kitsi-Mitakou 3). In The Professor, the male voice of the narrator, the representation of his mind as a camera obscura and the claim of his vision to scientific objectivity merge with the subjective, penetrating vision of the tutor who, assuming an idiosyncratic point of view, can have access beneath the surface of illusive appearances.

The tutor’s penetrating vision, which can distinguish the ideal from the real, enables him to see the otherwise invisible Mlle Henri. Mlle Henri occupies an ambiguous position in the pensionnat—she is both a teacher (of lace mending) and a pupil (since she starts to learn English). When she is first introduced by Crimsworth, she is invisible among an uncontrollable crowd of her pupils; she seems to “possess
little character, as her pupils seemed constantly *en revolte* against her authority*” (P 75).

Mlle Henri emerges in the narrative gradually. As the narrator confesses to the reader, “it is not my intention to communicate to you at once a knowledge I myself gained little by little” (P 90). Therefore, little by little, the vague characteristics of Mlle Henri are disclosed to the reader. First she is treated as a character towards whom the narrator appears to be indifferent. The narrator has difficulty even in remembering her name: “her name, I think, was Mlle Henri” (P 75), thus teasing the reader, since Mlle Henri eventually becomes a very important character in the novel. Mlle Henri occupies an ambiguous position and has serious difficulty in establishing her authority over her pupils. Crimsworth’s penetrating vision gradually shifts from Mlle Reuter, the manipulative female educator, and focuses on its antipode. This is the rising character of Mlle Henri who works hard her way up in the social ladder.

So, our first impressions of Mlle Henri is that she is a shy, low-profile girl with difficulties in handling her pupils and the situation she finds herself in. Crimsworth attributes this lack of authority to a weakness of her character: “it costs her a most painful effort to enter into conflict, with this foreign will (of the pupils),” as he thinks that “her will was impeded by many scruples” (P 95, 96). Mlle Henri herself explains that her situation was a situation of containment, an imprisonment in stagnate waters with no way out:

> In Switzerland I have done but little, learned but little, and seen but little. My life there was in a circle. I walked the same round everyday; I could not get

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45 Shuttleworth reads in Mlle Henri both a mirror image of Crimsworth as well as an “external site” upon which he projects his own “internal struggles” (138). She evolves as the perfect match for Crimsworth, and as the antipode to both Mlle Reuter and the “collective gaze of the shameless pupils” (Shuttleworth 140).
out of it. Had I rested—remained there even till my death, I should never have
enlarged, because I am poor and not skilful; I have not great acquirements (P
106, my italics).

Her starting point is described then in the same imagery of the automaton. She is a
female version of the automaton that Crimsworth has already been, which is confined
in a stagnant routine, walking “the same round every day” and not being able to get
out of it. And in her own words she could never get out of it because she is poor and
not skilful. Mlle Henri fights against her lack of means and educational skills in order
to find a way out of this claustrophobic automaton-like condition. As Marianne
Thormählen points out, Mlle Henri’s development as a successful teacher is mainly
presented as a matter of personal development and transformation (77). Mlle Henri’s
new-found happiness and increased academic prestige make her a more cheerful and
self-assured person, and as her vulnerability decreases her previous tormentors “[lose]
their power over her” (Thormählen 177).

Education is the way out of this automaton-like situation and it is Crimsworth
who functions as the catalyst for this rising character, in the same way Mr Hunsden
functioned as a catalyst for Crimsworth. The refinement of her education, her
performance in her English classes under the guidance of Crimsworth, which is
outstanding in comparison with her pupils-classmates, and the development of her
relation with Crimsworth reinforces her self-confidence and helps her establish
control over her pupils.

Mlle Henri would have passed unnoticed in her first English lessons, if
Crimsworth’s educated, penetrating vision had not attempted to access “what she
really is” (P 97). The methodology he employs in his effort to know her combines
vision and mental activity. The “nature and extent of her powers” are reflected on the
written words of her devoir. Therefore, by reading her devoir Crimsworth can “see a
glimpse of what she really is” (P 97):

‘Now,’ thought I, ‘I shall see a glimpse of what she really is; I shall get an idea of
the nature and the extent of her powers. Not that she can be expected to
express herself well in a foreign tongue; but still, if she has any mind, here
will be a reflection of it.’ (P 97)

The educator is given the opportunity to see what is invisible to other people because
of his educated vision and because of the circumstances that give him such an
opportunity. He has access to the written text of his student which is transformed into
a reflection, a visual evidence of one’s mind. The written text becomes a reflection of
the mind, a site which gives form to the colours of the prism of one’s mind. In her
short story “Passing Events,” Brontë says that the “mind is like a prism, full of
colours but not of forms.” And at this point, she furthers her ‘theory of the mind’ by
defining that the mind can be reflected, and thus take some kind of form and be
perceived by means of the written text. Thus, the written text (the devoir) becomes a
space which the tutor penetrates by reading it; it is like a camera obscura where his
disembodied eye sees the reflection of the reality (her mind) on the opposite wall.
And thus as a scientist, the tutor can reach the truth, the inner substance of the person
in front of him. But at the same time, his understanding is the result of his reading,
that is, of his interpretation which involves his specific point of view.

46 “Devoir” is the French word for ‘duty’ and it is a common word for ‘homework.’ It often refers to
student compositions which were a basic feature in the French and Belgian educational systems
(Alexander and Smith 158). As far as the Brontës are concerned, their “devoirs” were the compositions
that both Charlotte and Emily Brontë wrote as homework when they studied in Belgium, at the
Pensionnat Heger. They are written in French, and they are important, because apart from Wuthering Heights and her Diary Papers, they are Emily Brontë’s most significant prose writings. As far as Charlotte Brontë is concerned, they were an incentive for her to break away from her adolescent writings (the Glass Town and the Angrian Tales) and to write for an audience other than her family (Alexander and Smith 162). Nineteen devoirs written by Charlotte Brontë and nine written by Emily Brontë have survived, and two others are known but untraceable (Alexander and Smith 158).
However, Crimsworth struggles to retain his tone of superiority in comparison to his wife, in a discourse that empowers himself. For example, he underestimates her mental capacity when he says that she had difficulty in the comprehension of Wordsworth’s “deep, serene, and sober mind” (P 188). In addition, in their intellectual discussions she was like “a child and a novice” whereas he was acknowledged as her “senior and director” (P 188). Even the fact that Henri is a good wife is attributed by Crimsworth to his own good nature. He claims that a good wife is the reflection of a good husband (P 189). However, Brontë undermines her narrator and his tone of superiority by having Henri voice a centrifugal, antipatriarchal discourse. Henri declares that she herself would have left a bad husband (P 190). 

Marriage is a form of slavery if there is not love and in such case revolution is justified:

If a wife’s nature loathes that of a man she is wedded to, marriage must be a slavery. Against slavery all right thinkers revolt, and though torture be the price of resistance, torture must be dared. (P 190)

In addition, in the beginning Crimsworth is harsh to Mlle Henri by saying to her: “You propose to devote your life to teaching, and you are a most unsuccessful teacher; you cannot keep your pupils in order” (P 106). Although this is a harsh remark, it gives her the opportunity to react, and voice her determination to improve herself and reveal to the reader the metal of her own nature: “Monsieur, I am not a skilful teacher, it is true, but practice improves; besides, I work under difficulties” (P 106). And indeed, her hard work and Crimsworth’s “system” (P 109) benefit Mlle Henri both as a person and as a teacher:

She now took her place among her pupils with an air of spirit and firmness which assured them at once that she meant to be obeyed and obeyed she was.
… she possessed a source of comfort they could not drain, a pillar of support they could not overthrow. Formerly, when insulted, she wept; now, she smiled. (P 109)

Her determination to improve as a teacher reveals the metal of her nature. So, Mlle Henri proves industrious, intelligent and ambitious enough to gain Crimsworth’s respect and love and to find her own voice in her professional environment. For ten years, she proves a precious companion and helper in attaining their common life goal, that is to “realize an independency” (P 185). She sustains a low-profile persona, neither beautiful nor plain (P 90) who insists on submissively calling her fiancé “master” (P 166) and who is described by her husband as a “submissive and supplicating little mortal woman” (P 188). However, as soon as she becomes engaged to Crimsworth she declares her resolution to “retain [her] employment of teaching” (P 167). She states her will to remain independent from her husband and to lead an “active life” (P 168). She prefers teaching in close, noisy schoolrooms to “lingering at home, unemployed and solitary” (P 168). After her marriage, she stays with “her plan for progress” (P 184) and seeks ways to “rise in her profession. She [proposes] to begin a school” (P 184). Their school soon becomes one of the most popular in Brussels and their pupils are the children of the best families in Belgium. Thus, Mlle Henri embodies the ideal of the working woman and capable wife. As Crimsworth confesses:

As to this same Mrs Crimsworth, in one sense she was become another woman, though in another she remained unchanged. So different was she under different circumstances, I seemed to possess two wives. … in the daytime my house and establishment were conducted by madame the directress, a stately and elegant woman, bearing much anxious thought on her
large brow, much calculated dignity in her serious mien. … At six o’clock p.m. my daily labours ceased. I then came home, for my home was my heaven. Even at that hour, as I entered our private sitting-room, the lady directress vanished from before my eyes, and Frances Henri, my own little lace-mender, was magically restored to my arms. (*P 185-186, my italics*)

In this oscillation between equality and subjection (Davies 74), emerges the split subjectivity of the working woman. Mlle Henri appears to be “two wives,” the directress who is projected as a powerful presence successfully occupying the public sphere, and the wife who is a silent presence representing the Victorian ideal of the Angel in the House.

This split subjectivity, which is textually embodied in the “two wives” model, is the answer to Crimsworth’s split subjectivity which experienced the tension by the contrasting imperatives of voices in his mind, as described in the beginning of the novel. In a revision of the same pattern of the two voices, the subjectivity of the split wife as is embodied in Mlle Henri is characterized by the domestic voice which seems to acknowledge Crimsworth her master whereas the directress seems to align with a centrifugal voice that declares: “this is what I do to alter it.”

So, Mlle Henri’s split subject is a revision in a female version of Crimsworth’s male split subject. In her discourse of bivocality, she oscillates between two poles but she also includes all the hues and colours of the spectrum between the two extremes. She develops as an amalgam of centrifugal and centripetal discourses, justifying the

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47 In Crimsworth’s phrase that he possessed “two wives” Plasa reads also the sexually threatening connotations of foreign people. When Frances moves from English to French, she simultaneously oscillates between sexual self-control and sexual excess (Plasa 23). In the passage where Crimsworth punished her for speaking French, language becomes a sado-masochistic medium in which questions of sexuality, nation and race are fused (Plasa 24). In addition, when Frances talks French to her husband, she disrupts the illusion that Crimsworth has carefully built around her (Plasa 24). In addition, Stevie Davies reads in this phrase Crimsworth’s contradictory fantasy of equality and subjection regarding Frances, a duality which is valid in the whole novel (74).
traditional norms of the Victorian womanhood which dictate silence, modesty, restriction, docility and at the same time challenging this stereotype with her words and actions as a skilled, “stately and elegant” directress.

Her profession, that is, her work as an educator, is the catalyst which enables her to acquire this new identity away from the enclosed space of home, to become visible and expose herself in a new, broader social environment which permits her to develop a dialogic relationship with it. She establishes her own perspective against the background of other feminine perspectives like that of her students, Mlle Reuter but mostly that of her husband, Crimsworth.

However, the friction between the two extremes of the “two wives” does not lead to a resolution but remains an open-ended debate, discussion and exploration of the subject. The “two-wives” subject is always in flux, always in progress and endlessly oscillating between balance and imbalance. This unresolved tension between centrifugal and centripetal discourses forms the kernel of the elusive, heterogeneous female heroine, employed in all the later novels by Brontë, who advocates self-exploration and self-education and progress in life both as a social construct but as an epistemological agent as well. Thus the narrative follows as a circular pattern: it starts with the bivocality of the voices in Crimsworth’s mind and rounds off with the answer to his double standard in the figure of Mlle Henri who is viewed as a “two wives” subject. This is a heterogeneous new model of woman who behind silence and initial invisibility reveals on a second level “the metal of her nature” which is associated with power, mental potential, honesty, ambition and hard-work.

However, in the end, the reader cannot help but ask: Is Henri really split? Or is this the way Crimsworth perceives her? In his words, the lady directress vanishes
before his eyes, like an apparition. She is a construct of his perception but at the same time she is not reduced to a specimen to be observed by his objective vision, as Mlle Reuter was in the past. She manages to emerge before his eyes, conquer him and impose her presence in his life, both professionally and personally. And then again, in the end, she retreats, and is silenced, again without a job but having “realized the dream of her lifetime” (P 191). The novel ends with her figure as a tender mother of a male offspring, and we can imagine her astonishment and puzzlement in front of the violent incident with the killing of her son’s dog by her husband. In the end, Crimsworth’s perspective dominates. Mlle Henri is silenced and we are not sure what she thinks, how she feels. She is again in the periphery of the narrative and her internal conflicts remain unresolved.

6. CONCLUSION

The mind and the mental processes of understanding in The Professor are represented in Lockean terms; the mind is seen as a bipartite entity comprising both the site and the agent of the mental activity. The educator employs an idiosyncratic way of seeing things, which is penetrating and able to distinguish the real from the ideal without, though, negating and abolishing subjective and intuitive ways of perception. Thus the tutor’s vision forms a meeting point of the objective and the subjective types of vision. Both mental and visual representation qualifies the subjectivity of the educator who in this novel is a rising character, performing the transition from a lower to a higher social status as well as a progress of personal development.

In conclusion, we see that although Brontë chose a male narrator/protagonist in this novel, his vision and perception form the prism which is employed to discuss
opposing models of femininity and female educators. Crimsworth’s idiosyncratic vision, the tutor’s vision, is constructed as a meeting point of both objective (Newtonian) and subjective vision; the blending of these two perspectives leads to a penetrating vision which can access the “back side of the tapestry” and distinguish between illusion and reality. This ability to distinguish between illusion and reality allows him to perceive two contrasting models of female educators and femininity, one embodied by Mlle Reuter and the other by Mlle Henri. In the end, the “heterogeneous” Mlle Henri rises from invisibility and suppression, attains success both in the public and the private sphere and introduces the image of the heterogeneous woman who is further developed in Brontë’s more mature works.
Chapter Three

Jane Eyre: The Governess as an Epistemological Agent

The main question I attempt to answer in this chapter, is how Locke’s discussion of mental activities, as developed in his *Essay* contributed to the representation of the mind in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Brontë’s discussion of how knowledge is produced within the mind of the governess. Although there is a significant period of time, separating Locke’s *Essay* from *Jane Eyre*, scholars like Urlike Walker have shown that, although one cannot claim with certainty that Charlotte Brontë had read Locke’s *Essay* (even though it was available in the local library), the camera obscura as an apparatus and Locke’s model of the mind as a camera obscura had by her time become commonplace and paradigmatic enough to suggest that it formed part of her cultural background (U. Walker 55). For example, the camera obscura was referred to in letters to Charlotte Bronte by her friend Mary Taylor (U. Walker 37). Urlike Walker provides evidence in her work that Bronte’s epistemology was informed by Locke’s metaphor of the mind as a camera obscura (U. Walker 49).

I would like to argue that the metaphors which Locke uses in his *Essay* in order to represent mental activity mainly incorporate the image of a dark room, but also a more sophisticated model. According to William Walker’s reading, Locke’s metaphors are variations of one basic pattern: the mind is depicted as a bipartite entity which comprises both an enclosed space, and the agent of the mental activity (W. Walker 48). Examples of such a representation of the mind are located in *Jane Eyre* and they contribute to the construction of the inner mental world and the profound
mental interiority of Charlotte Brontë’s novels which has been noted by many Brontë scholars. In Locke’s Essay the mind is represented mainly as a “dark room” or as “a closet … sealed against light” (Locke 43). Similarly, Jane Eyre describes her own mind as a “rayless dungeon” (JE 403). Ideas and thoughts are represented as furniture in Locke’s Essay (Locke 426) and this is the case in Jane Eyre too, where the subjects of Jane’s drawings are referred to as “furniture” in her head/mind (JE 124-125).

However, the mere existence of ideas/furniture inside a room/mental space does not produce knowledge. So, the agent who produces knowledge usually is an observing (mental) eye since sight is for Locke “the most comprehensive of our senses” (Locke 83). Similarly, Jane Eyre often uses her mental eye to see mental pictures (JE 124-125) and as Amanda Witt puts it, “Jane tends either to convert things to visual terms or actually to translate them into visual images” (29). Other images of the mind which appear both in Locke’s Essay and in Jane Eyre are: the mind as a storeroom where ideas are gathered by a labourer (JE 373), the mind as a site of socio-erotic activity (JE 83, 438), the mind and the impressible substance (JE 451) and seeing as groping (JE 433).

All these examples of the parallels that can be drawn between Locke’s Essay and Jane Eyre uncover Brontë’s incorporation in her discourse of aspects of Locke’s tropes and his discussion of the mind. The mental action within this room-like mind throughout the novel is parallel to Jane Eyre’s pilgrimage in life. What this progress signifies in terms of mental action is a progress of the female subject from superstition to enlightenment.

For example, Michael Kearns, William Cohen, Rachel Malane, Urlike Walker have all dealt with aspects of the representation of the mind in Charlotte Brontë’s novels. They have discussed the spatial representation of the mind and they have often stressed the interiority of the subjects in her novels.
In the beginning of the novel, the first threat that Jane Eyre faces as a child is terror, fear and “Superstition” (JE 14) in the Red room. From that time on, in every crucial moment of her life when she has to take an important decision, she withdraws in a dark room, and she describes the mental activity that takes place inside the dark room of her mind. In her discourse, there is a dialogic relationship between superstitious voices and the emerging intense thinking of a rational agent struggling to understand. As the novel progresses, the reader witnesses the gradual withdrawal of superstition replaced by the contrariwise fortification of Jane Eyre’s claim to clear, rational thinking.

In the end of the novel, when Jane Eyre hears Rochester’s eerie cry calling her name, (quite paradoxically) the epistemological goal of enlightenment is achieved against “superstition,” “deception” and “witchcraft” (JE 420). Her mental goal is achieved through what she herself calls her enlightenment: “I [was] … unscared, enlightened” (JE 420). The methodology of her new way of knowing, is “to search—inquire—to grope an outlet” from doubt and uncertainty (JE 421). So, the old epistemology of witchcraft which was traditionally attributed to women is replaced by groping, a female way of touching, which in Jane’s words is analogous with searching and inquiring and which is also justified as a saving option for Rochester in the image of the groping blindman. This new epistemology is defined by the traditional masculine epistemological values of searching and inquiring which are cross-fertilized with the feminine elements of groping and inwardness/intuition/instinct. Thus, Jane Eyre does not entirely reject the tradition of feminine epistemology but by exploring and incorporating the tradition of

49 Touching and groping are seen as female ways of expression, rather than masculine, since they involve primarily the body and the senses, rather than the mind and reason which are traditionally associated with masculinity.
enlightenment she moves on to a more mature and sophisticated epistemology which defines her as a knower.

Her epistemic standpoint is further fortified in relation to the standpoints of other female characters in the novel. As a governess, Jane Eyre occupies a peripheral and a marginalized position, as a foreign and threatening presence in both the bourgeois family and the social stratification of her time, but at the same time she is central in the production and the transmission of knowledge because of her role as an educator. It is this characteristic, that is, her well-developed mental capacity and the fact that she appreciates knowledge and education, as well as her “enlightened way of knowing” that Jane uses to empower herself in her narration, often at the expense of the other female characters in the novel.

For example, the perspective of the upper middle class woman who treats governesses as outcasts is harshly attacked in the face of Eliza and Georgiana Reed, Blanche Ingram and Rosamond Oliver. Miss Ingram is described by Jane as inadequate in relation to her own mental abilities, as “very showy” and “not genuine” with a “poor mind” and “barren heart” (JE 185). Furthermore, Bertha, whose mind is considered by Rochester as insufficient in spatial terms since it is “common, low, narrow and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger…” (JE 306), represents the restricted mental abilities of the Other, but it also reveals Jane’s lack of ability to approach and comprehend another version of reality, maybe out of fear or prejudice. Jane Eyre’s attitude to Bertha’s mental capacity reveals the middle-class component of the mental construction of the governess. However, on the whole, among the female characters of the novel, the governess, as exemplified by Jane Eyre and as projected through the narrator’s perspective, is
foregrounded as the most enlightened character of the novel, educated and capable of surviving and achieving her goals.

Jane Eyre’s epistemological agency contributes to the delineation of the heterogeneity of the woman, an aspect of femininity which was introduced in Brontë’s first novel *The Professor*, as already seen, and is further discussed in the images of female heroines like Jane Eyre, Caroline and Lucy Snowe. In fact, it is in *Jane Eyre* that we first encounter the term “heterogeneous” as defining the heroine:

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there: I had nothing in harmony with Mrs Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathise with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment. I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child—though equally dependent and friendless—Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently; her children would have entertained for me more of the cordiality of fellow-feeling; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scapegoat of the nursery.

(*JE* 15-16, my italics)

So, Jane Eyre defines her heterogeneity by being in discord with her environment. She is an ambivalent, almost liminal creature, in conflict with the rest of the people around her. At the core of her heterogeneity lies the notion of education, self-exploration and the quest for knowledge itself. As Thormählen points out, for Brontë the end of an individual’s self-education is not harmony with society, but rather
harmony with himself or herself (4). So, in *Jane Eyre*, the heterogeneity of the female character is discussed from the viewpoint of self education and epistemology.

My attempt to uncover an epistemological pattern that explores the ways through which Jane Eyre acquires knowledge begins with the exploration of the novel’s representation of the mind. The representation of the mind in *Jane Eyre* incorporates aspects of Locke’s images of the mind showing thus a close association with the Enlightenment. The progress in Jane’s mind which is parallel to her pilgrimage in life signifies a movement from Superstition to Enlightenment that is from a feminized, subordinate epistemology towards a masculine, scientific ideal dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, enlightenment for Jane Eyre does not entail a total rejection of the traditional feminine epistemology and an adoption of masculine ways of knowing, but rather the cross-fertilization of the masculine and feminine elements of the human mind. This process leads to the construction of alternative feminine epistemologies, which imply an “enlightened” feminized way of knowing. Jane’s new, more mature but still ambiguous epistemology is tested against the epistemic viewpoints of the other female characters in the novel. Jane uses these women in order to learn from them and educate herself, but later their discourse is reappropriated, fortifying thus Jane’s subjectivity and her epistemic agency.

1. THE MEETING POINT OF SCIENTIFIC EPistemology AND FICTIONAL NARRATIVES

*Bildungsroman* narratives and most autobiographies (*Jane Eyre* is subtitled as “Autobiography”) are narratives of discovery, posing questions of “truth, discovery, construction, disinterest and objectivity” (Levine, *Dying to Know* 11). George Levine draws a parallel between scientific narratives and nineteenth-century narratives (either
novels or autobiographies) in the sense that an epistemological narrative describes “a pilgrim’s progress” that is a “rejection of the inherited things of this world, a journey necessarily austere, away from temptation and the devious pulls of desire and imagination into the truth and the future” (Levine, Dying to know 21). Especially in autobiographies, epistemology and narratives coincide since “the writer chooses to look at himself with scientific detachment” so that the book echoes with “a sense of self-alienation.” As the writer tries to narrate his life and to explain himself, he becomes “a distanced narrator of his own life … and separates himself from himself just as social scientists must avoid any personal sympathy from their human subjects” (Levine, Dying to know 94). So, autobiographical narratives offer two subjects for interpretation: the subject who narrates, and the one who is a character in the story; or in David Amigoni’s words:

Autobiographical narratives posit two subjects for the reader to interpret: the subject who enunciates the narration, and the one who is a character in the story told. The latter is a younger version of the former, the former is a ‘developed’ outcome of the latter. The conventions which construct this sense of development are evident in Jane’s narrative voice. (Amigoni 61)

Jane Eyre is narrated by a narrator in retrospection, and as a Bildungsroman, it has at its core an epistemological project, since it describes an individual’s progress in life, her desire and her journey to know herself and the others around her.

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50 George Levine seems to agree with Amanda Anderson that real detachment, in other words full objectivity, is more an aspiration than a possible achievement and that objectivity is aligned with the sense of detachment, disinterestedness and selflessness, in other words with the effacement of the scientist (Dying to Know 14). His main claim is that nineteenth-century narratives suggest that, however important it is to affirm the value of personal desire, to recognize the way thought and feeling are entangled, how rationality rarely determines action or even establishes authoritatively what the case is, “it seems as though the culture’s imagination of what is possible simply requires something like objectivity” (Levine, Dying to Know 12).
Therefore, the pattern of the “pilgrim’s progress” is not only applicable to scientific discourse of the nineteenth century but also to fictional narratives like *Jane Eyre*. As Sandra Gilbert holds, Jane’s story is modeled on the pattern of a pilgrimage, like Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. She points out that “Jane Eyre makes a life journey which is a kind of mythical progress from one significantly named place to another” (Gilbert 783). From her unhappy life in the home of the Reeds family at Gateshead Hall, she moves to the school of Lowood, then as a young governess she moves to Thornfield, then to the Rivers’ house and last she settles with Rochester in Ferndean. Jane’s story is a pilgrim’s progress towards maturity through “a story of enclosure and escape” (Gilbert 781). It is a distinctively female *Bildungsroman* in which the problems encountered by the protagonist are “symptomatic of difficulties that Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome: oppression (at Gateshead), starvation (at Lowood), madness (at Thornfield) and coldness (at Marsh End)” (Gilbert 781). Levine’s point that the way we tell stories may indicate presiding ideas about how it is possible to know (Levine, *Dying to Know* 27) may prove useful in our attempt to explore Jane’s subjectivity as a knowing agent in her progress through life and towards maturation.

My attempt to uncover an epistemological pattern that explores the ways through which Jane Eyre acquires knowledge begins with the exploration of the novel’s representation of the mind. The representation of the mind in *Jane Eyre* incorporates aspects of Locke’s images of the mind and is closely associated with eighteenth-century Enlightenment. It also raises gender issues in relation to the mind. The progress of Jane’s mind, which is parallel to her pilgrimage in life, signifies a movement from Superstition to Enlightenment, that is, from a feminized, subordinate epistemology towards a masculine, scientific ideal dominant in the eighteenth century.
However, enlightenment for Jane does not entail a total rejection of the traditional female epistemology and an adoption of male epistemologies, but rather the cross-fertilization of the male and female elements of the human mind. This process leads to the construction of alternative feminine epistemologies, which imply “enlightened” feminized ways of knowing. Jane’s new more mature epistemology is tested against the epistemic viewpoints of the other female characters in the novel. Jane uses these women in order to learn from them and educate herself, but later they are effaced, fortifying thus Jane’s subjectivity and her epistemic agency.

2. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MIND IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S NOVELS

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the mind-as-entity metaphor provided a framework for the conceptualization of mental activity. As Michael Kearns explains, in various texts of that time (like school texts and university courses) the mind was conceived as being shaped by impressions, “associations from pathways in the mind” and the mind’s operations were grouped into faculties or powers (Kearns 92). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the mind-as-entity metaphor was frequent in most works concerning issues of the discipline that we call today “psychology.” However, whereas the writers on psychology issues tended to employ the mind-as-entity metaphor, that is, they tended to treat the mind “as a separable entity [which is] localizable and discreet although ‘in-substance’ and immaterial” (Kearns 88, my italics), the novelists of that period did not perceive the mind as an entity separate from the individual, but rather sought a way of representing the mind as a living being identical with the character in whose brain it existed (Kearns 88).
According to Kearns, Charlotte Brontë, although a novelist, seemed to align herself with the “psychologists’” conceptualization of the mind and employed the mind-as-entity metaphor: she referred to the minds of her characters as impressible and discreet entities and insisted on a point-for-point connection between external appearances and internal reality (Kearns 142). This was a significant step towards the representation of the mind as a separate living thing and Brontë retained the mind-as-entity metaphor of separate mental faculties by representing the mind as separate from the self and from passions (Kearns 146).

Apart from Kearns, William Cohen has also explored issues concerning the representation of the mind in Brontë’s works. Cohen holds that Brontë’s notion of personhood consisted in the idea of the body as a “container” of the self and detects this in the language of architecture that Brontë employed for the body as well as the images of confinement and entombment that permeate her texts (Cohen, Material Interiority 450-451). Cohen holds that in Brontë’s texts the body was the missing link between the interior of an individual and the “structure” that surrounded him/her, and in this respect the body encloses the self in contradictory ways: both oppressively and protectively (Cohen, Embodied 42). Thus by imagining the inside of a person as physically inhabiting the inside of a body, Brontë “gave vivid form to the idea of embodied human subjectivity, of an interior with the properties of a material entity” (Cohen, Embodied 45).

Therefore, according to the aforementioned critics, in Brontë’s novels the mind is not so much a living being identical with the protagonist whose thoughts are communicated in the text, but is very often represented as an entity separate from the individual or as an entity enclosed in the body of the individual. However, I would like to argue that in Brontë’s novels the mind is represented as a bipartite entity which
comprises simultaneously both the enclosed space and the agent who performs a (mental) action inside this space. This conceptualization of the mind and mental activities, as I will now demonstrate, is in accordance with Locke’s theories of the mind.

3. IMAGES OF THE MIND IN LOCKE’S ESSAY AND JANE EYRE

_The Mind as a Chamber._ The metaphors that Locke used for the representation of the mind and the mental activity in his _An Essay Concerning Human Understanding_ (1690) have been analysed extensively by William Walker. According to Walker’s reading, the metaphors used by Locke to represent mental activity are variations of one basic pattern: the mind is a bipartite entity which comprises both the site and the agent of the mental activity. More specifically, the mind is represented predominantly as a room where the ideas are the furniture, that is, objects of observation. In Locke’s _Essay_ ideas, feelings and thoughts are objectified and they are represented as the “furnishings of the mind”:

> One may perceive how, by degrees, afterward ideas come into their [children’s] minds; and that they get no more, nor no other than what experience, and the observation of things that come in their way, furnish them with: which might be enough to satisfy us that they are not original characters stamped on the mind. (Locke 62, my italics)

This conception is encountered in _Jane Eyre_. The scene when Rochester questions Jane about her drawings is dominated by the image of the mind as a room, ideas as furniture in this room and as objects to be looked at by the mind’s eye:

> [Rochester] “When did you find time to do them [the drawings]?...”
“I did them in the last two vacations …”

“Where did you get your copies?”

“Out of my head.”

“That head I see now on your shoulders?”

“Yes, sir”

“Has it other furniture of the same kind within?”

“I should think it may have: I should hope – better.”

…..The subjects had, indeed, risen vividly on my mind…. I saw them with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them… . (JE 124-125, my italics)

In this instance, the ocularcentric discourse is prominent since ideas and mental images are objects to be looked at by both the actual and the “mental eye.” Ocularcentric discourse is one of the fundamental epistemological discourses in Jane Eyre. From the first chapter Jane Eyre describes the ocular attributes of everyone whom she meets, because for her everything is best understood when it relates to vision. As Amanda Witt puts it “Jane tends either to convert things to visual terms or actually to translate them into visual images” (Witt 29). Such a process of multiple “translation” occurs in the text above. Visual images are translated into mental images and then again turn into the subjects of actual drawings. This multiple process indicates the epistemological complex which is based on sight, whether physical or mental.

The Mind as a Storeroom. The spatial and the ocular discourses are not the only ones that Locke employs to discuss the mind and mental activities. The mind is also represented as a storeroom where knowledge stands for the possessions that are
accumulated by a labourer. As William Walker explains, simply observing an object/idea is not enough to comprehend it (W. Walker 46). Locke uses the discourse of labour and property as well as an economic narrative (W. Walker 50) to provide a more insightful comment on mental actions like thinking and reasoning. In other words, Locke views “knowing as possessing” (W. Walker 43). In this framework, the mind is metaphorically represented as an enclosed space again, but this time as a worksite for a man-labourer and a storehouse for the property and material goods (ideas) that he accumulates (W. Walker 47). Locke uses terms like “exertion,” “work,” “industry,” “gathering,” “application” and “employment” to identify thinking (W. Walker 46-47). In addition, Locke distinguishes between the man who “employs” and “uses” his faculties to “acquire” and “obtain” an idea, and the “lazy” man who only takes up ideas by chance (W. Walker 46). As he writes:

Aristotle was certainly a knowing man, but nobody ever thought him so, because he blindly embraced and confidently vented the opinions of another. And if the taking up of another’s principles, without examining them, made not him a philosopher, I suppose it will hardly make anybody else so. In the sciences, every one has so much as he really knows and comprehends. What he believes only, and takes upon trust, are but shreds; which however well in the whole piece, make no considerable addition to his stock, who gathers them. Such borrowed wealth, like Fairy money, though it were Gold in the hand from which he received it, will be but Leaves and Dust when it comes to use. (Locke 73, my italics)

In this extract “having” is associated with “knowing” and “comprehending,” thus Locke uses the discourse of property as a principal metaphorical representation of the mind and its actions (W. Walker 51). The idea of mental actions as labour is
exemplified in *Jane Eyre* when St John Rivers admits his love for Rosamond Oliver as a:

Human love rising like a freshly opened fountain in my mind, and overflowing with sweet inundation all the field I have so carefully, and with such labour prepared – so assiduously sown with the seeds of good intentions, of self-denying plans ... Now ... that little space was given to delirium and delusion. 

(*JE* 373)

In this case, St John talks of a mind as a field prepared with “such labour.” The “little space” that he refers to may be the time lapse of fifteen minutes that he allocated to himself to surrender to temptation, but it could also be his mind which was given to the delirium of his fantasy. Furthermore, labour is particularly appreciated by Charlotte Brontë as far as knowledge, education and mental activity are concerned. Jane Eyre underscores her hard work as a teacher and “the labours of the village school” as well as the progress of her pupils by means of hard work and effort (*JE* 365-366). The idea that valuable knowledge cannot be gained without hard work prevails in all the books written by the Brontës (Thormählen 159); the discourse of labour is closely associated with mental activities and educational discourse.

*The Mind as a Site of Socio-Erotic Activity.* Furthermore, the mind in Locke’s *Essay* is represented as a site of socio-erotic activity where the man “embraces,” “courts” and “entertains” women/ideas. In other words, the enclosed space of the mind is also designated as a “scene of socio-erotic activity” (W. Walker 56). This space is specified as a chamber, dressing-room, or drawing-room within which a man gets acquainted with women (W. Walker 71):
[Men] grow fond of the Notions they have been long acquainted with [in their mind, and] … take up some borrowed principles; which being reputed and presumed to be the evident proofs of other things, are thought not to need any other proof themselves. Whoever shall take any of these into his Mind, and entertain them there, with the reverence usually paid to Principles, never venturing to examine them; but accustoming himself to believe them, because they are to be believed, may take up from his Education, and the fashions of his Country, any absurdity for innate Principles; and by long poring on the same Objects, so dim his sight, as to take Monsters lodged in his own brain, for the Images of the Deity, and the Workmanship of his Hands. (Locke 61; also qtd in W. Walker 70)

Walker reads in words like “fondness,” “acquaintance,” “taking up,” “reputation,” “receiving into,” “entertaining,” “revering,” “fashion,” “lodging,” Locke’s attempt to establish the scene of a man’s acquaintance with a woman as one of the principal models of thinking in his Essay (W. Walker 70, 71).

In Jane Eyre, such terminology is used to convey mental activities as well as more general educational issues. For example, Jane Eyre declares that for the eight years that she stayed at Lowood she developed a “fondness” for her studies (JE 83). Furthermore, people may “entertain” certain “views,” “ideas” and “doubts” (JE 438). Furthermore, the classroom is often depicted as a socio-erotic site and the relationship between the teacher and the pupil is based on erotic emotions in almost all of the Brontë novels. As Elizabeth Gargano explains, in Charlotte Brontë’s Shirley, the eroticized relationship between Shirley and her tutor, Louis Moore, echoes the image of the eroticized relationship between the tutor and the pupil as it appears in Rousseau’s novel Nouvelle Heloise (Gargano 1). In Jane Eyre, eroticism (either overt
or more subtle) merges with Jane’s educational relations both with Rochester and St John. Jane is educated by her lover/Rochester as he “liked to open to a mind unacquainted with the world, glimpses of its scenes and ways” and she had a “keen delight in receiving the new ideas he offered, in imaging the new pictures he portrayed, and following him in thought through the new regions he disclosed” (JE 146). She calls him “master,” a word used in the Brontë novels to indicate also the teacher/tutor. Besides, St John teaches her Hindostanee and during these lessons the idea to propose marriage to her develops. According to Patricia Menon, Jane has been fully committed to Rochester when she meets her “schoolroom mentor” St John, who is himself in love with Rosamond. So, this offers a test case by means of which the relative importance and interrelationship of sexual love, power and mentorship may be examined outside the confines of Brontë’s usual pattern (Menon 100).

The Mind and the “Impressible Substance.” Locke considers sight as the most “comprehensive of our senses” which conveys to our minds the ideas of light and colour which are peculiar to this sense (Locke 100). However, in Locke’s Essay sight proves to be in fact less comprehensive than we think it is, and so it should be supplemented in various ways in order to provide what we expect it to provide (W. Walker 86). For instance, Locke’s answer to the Molyneux problem51 shows that sight and touch are interdependent, since the blind man who gains his sight does not know

51 Molyneux problem: Locke received a letter from a lawyer called Molyneux who posed to him the following question: Suppose that a man was born blind, grew adult, and during his life he was taught by touch to distinguish items like a cube and a sphere of the same size and of the same material. If he were somehow made to see, could he be able to say which is the sphere and which is the cube, only by seeing them and not by touching them? Locke answered that the man would not be able to say with certainty which was the sphere and which was the cube only by seeing them, but he would unmistakably distinguish between the two by touch (W. Walker 85-86).
how the ideas gained from seeing are related to the ideas gained from touching (W. Walker 86).

This interrelationship of the senses and the need to complement eyesight with other senses like touching, for example, is exemplified in the motif of the “groping blindman” (Bolt 273). When Jane sees the blind Rochester for the first time in Ferndean, “he seemed to wish by touch to gain an idea of what lay around him” (JE 431) and “he groped his way back to the house” (JE 432). In this case touching is projected as a complementary source of knowledge. When Jane enters his room, Rochester asks her to speak, explaining that “I cannot see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever—whoever you are—be perceptible to the touch or I can not live” (JE 433). Thus, groping or touching is elevated to the status of an absolutely necessary means of comprehending and surviving. Blind Rochester’s whole existence depends on this sense. Knowledge, perception and more importantly life itself derive from a new epistemology based on the tactile sense and the body. In the absence of sight, the means to gain ideas and knowledge is not the eyes anymore but the hands and the body which moves around its surrounding space. Therefore, the eye is turned into a hand,52 with reflection nourished by stimuli gathered by an alternative way that is groping and moving around. Thus the imaginary labourer who

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52 Interestingly, according to Roland Barthes there is a haptic relationship between the viewer and the object of his gaze, more specifically when photographed, as he argues in his Camera Lucida. He illustrates his point as follows:

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here … A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed. (80-81)

So, seeing and touching are interdependent, the two sides of the same coin as far as epistemology and knowledge acquisition are concerned, an idea which is discussed by Brontë in the image of the groping blindman, as well as in Locke’s perception of seeing as a tactile sense, as I would like to argue shortly.
works hard with his hands in order to collect the property/ideas is transformed literally into the groping blindman who collects his ideas by touching.\textsuperscript{53}

There is another aspect of the \textit{Essay} which shows how seeing and touching are interdependent. Locke regards seeing as an inherently tactile sense, whereby the eye is considered as a solid body which is struck by and receives motion from particles of matter (W. Walker 91). In this framework, the mind is represented as an enclosed space (the mental site) inside which there is a material body (the mental agent) capable of being struck by other material bodies (particles of matter, such as light) (W. Walker 93). In Locke’s metaphors, this mental agent is not a readable imprinted substance (as innatists hold)\textsuperscript{54} but an “animate” substance that is struck by and at the same time senses various kinds of particles (W. Walker 94). So, the eye in this context (of the atomistic theory of vision) is itself an organ/body that is struck and \textit{impressed} by particles (i.e. a body upon which force may be directly impressed), and at the same time the eye is an organ of perception, (i.e. the organ through which force may be perceived) (W. Walker 105). Therefore, vision is coherently conceived as the reception and the perception of force\textsuperscript{55}—according to Newton’s definition of force.

\textsuperscript{53}Moreover, in the motif of the blindman, the dynamic relationship between Sensation and Reflection, that is, the eye and the inward eye, is manifest. According to Kate Flint’s reading, Rochester’s blinding is a form of punishment which, however, ultimately proves to be a means of illuminating the “inward eye” (80). On the whole, the issue of Rochester’s blindness is controversial and dealt with by many critics and is approached from different perspectives. For example, Bolt reads in Rochester/blindman a diminished character who augments the status of the sighted protagonist/Jane (285). On the other hand, Amanda Witt holds that Rochester’s blinding is also Jane’s tragedy: when she got ready for “the passion of her lover’s gaze, he can no longer give it to her” (33).

\textsuperscript{54} The innatists’ imagery of the mind is that of a mind represented as an imprinted substance. Locke challenges this innatist claim in his attempt to refute the innatist’s claim that the child has ideas (that is it receives impressions) independently of experience. Locke claims that the mind receives impressions only through experience (Sensation ad Reflection). In some instances in his \textit{Essay}, he attributes to the innatist language of impression a bipartite figurative representation of the mind: the mind is both an engraved substance and (at the same time) a person or an eye which sees, reads and understands these engravings (W. Walker 34-35).

\textsuperscript{55} “Every body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it” (Newton, \textit{Prinicipia Mathematica} qtd in W. Walker 95). The physicist’s perspective of force is the impulsive or momentaneous action that occurs when one object strikes or is struck by another (W. Walker 104).
(W. Walker 190). And in this context the notion of force is closely associated with the notion of the impression\(^{56}\) of particles of matter/light upon the sensory organ, the eye. This is explicitly described by Brontë when Jane declares, “never did I weary of gazing on [Rochester’s] behalf … and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye” (JE 451, my italics).

The term “impression” is often employed by Brontë in relation to understanding and to mental activity. For example, Jane claims that drawing is particularly beneficial to her, in the sense that she “had kept her head and hands employed, and had given force and fixedness to the new impressions she wished to stamp indelibly on her heart” (JE 162, my italics).\(^{57}\) St John is described by Jane as a man especially susceptible to deeply engraved, forceful, permanent impressions: “you felt that every impression made on him, either for pain or pleasure, was deeply graved and permanent” (JE 397, my italics). Questioning herself about the mysterious cry she heard, Jane investigates its nature in “the soul’s cell” and can not decide whether it was “an inward sensation,” “a nervous impression,” “a delusion” or an “inspiration” (JE 421). In addition, Jane as the author of her autobiography shares with her reader the concern about whether her tale of Rochester’s cry would make “a profound impression on the mind of [her] hearer … which needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural” (JE 448). All these examples indicate that impression is considered by Brontë as a mental action which is stamped upon an imaginary substance by means of force and fixedness. The agent who perceives the impressions within the imaginary

\(^{56}\)Light and visible objects can force themselves upon the eye, can overcome its resistance, and can directly weigh upon it, this way they produce what Locke calls “knowledge” (W. Walker 99). The eye (the mental agent) both sees force and weight as properties which objects have in relation to other objects and the eye is itself subject to the force and weight of what it sees (W. Walker 100).

\(^{57}\)Also, after a detailed description of Jane’s eyes, the gipsy/ Rochester declares that “impression follows impression through its [the eye’s] clear sphere … an unconscious lassitude weighs on the lid… The eye is favourable” (JE 200- 201).
mental space of the mind is the eye. In the aforementioned examples, impression is a private, mental activity, always taking place in an enclosed mental space, the mind; it is defined in terms of permanency, stamping, force, depth, profoundness and weight and it is mostly the object of eyesight.

To recapitulate so far, in Locke’s *Essay*, the spatial metaphor of the mind as an enclosed space and the ocular discourse which foregrounds eyesight as understanding in this space are prevailing in the range of the metaphors Locke uses for the mind and mental activity. However, as we have seen, the ocular discourse is not the only one used in Locke’s text. He also employs the discourse of labour, representing the mind as a storeroom where ideas are stored as items/possessions. Furthermore, the enclosed space of the mind is metaphorically described as a site of socio-erotic activity, as a chamber where a man entertains women/ideas. In addition, in some instances, sight is perceived as an inherently tactile sense, and the mind the organ of both of the impression and perception of external stimuli.58 *Jane Eyre*, as I have argued, makes prevalent use of the representation of the mind as an enclosed space in which knowledge is attained by various means, but mainly through vision.

*The Mind as a Room: A Gendered or a Gender-Free Space?* In *Jane Eyre*, as we have seen, the mind is represented as a bipartite entity, that is, an enclosed space inside which certain processes generate knowledge. So, is this entity gendered? Or is it a gender-free space? Jane Eyre declares that generally she is fascinated by the “communication with strong, discreet, and refined minds, whether male or female” (*JE* 374, my italics). She is not interested in the gender of an interesting mind, but

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58 See chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 in W. Walker’s *Locke*. 
only in seeing inside this space, in its penetration. Her interest is primarily to “pass the outworks of conventional reserve,” “cross the threshold of confidence and win a place by their heart’s very hearthstone” (JE 375). Therefore, the mind would seem to be represented as highly domestic with its “threshold” and “hearthstone,” which is free from any gender marking, at least in Jane’s words. But is this really so?

The tropes of an enclosed space/room and furnishing as representations of the mind were closely associated with the notions of the domestic and the female in the Victorian period. The fact that “Locke’s philosophy of empirical knowledge found its most resonant articulation in the profoundly feminized space of the domestic sphere” (Ogden 29) places women at the origin of knowledge. As Ogden explains, Locke understands the negotiation of the “rooms” and their “furnishings” by employing a kind of “feminized domestic vision mediated through the mind’s eye” (Ogden 29). With respect to the pervasiveness of Locke’s domestic metaphor, we see that his epistemology was profoundly shaped by his visualization of the kind of “furnished room that would in his lifetime have been dominantly overseen by a woman” (Ogden 29, my italics). Therefore, the very fact that Locke chose to use the metaphor of the room and its furniture to represent the mind is a step towards a feminized conceptualization of the mind and the mental activities. The adoption of such a feminized view of the mind on the part of Charlotte Brontë shows that in her consciousness, the mental site which generates knowledge is not so gender-free but in fact is closely associated with the female.

It is also important to mention the fact that Locke places the woman at the source of knowledge and emphasizes especially the role of the mother, the maid and the governess. Locke places women at the origin of the “sacred and ostensibly innate belief” because in his account it is the woman who takes care of an infant (the mother,
the nurse or an old woman), who instils in his/her mind what we consider as sacred or innate beliefs (W. Walker 57). The mother, the maid or the old woman who takes care of an infant is the first to “institute” in the child’s mind the very first notions it acquires in its life. However, the child does not have any consciousness or memory of these women’s influence because these women—sources of the first knowledge of the child—operate in the very early stages of his/her life, that is, before the mind of the child begins to remember. So, according to Locke, the educational function of these women is effaced, and the human mind considers the knowledge and the ideas which are acquired in this very early stage as pre-existing, that is, as deriving from God or Nature (and not as the result of the empirical interaction with the woman who takes care of him/her). In Locke’s account, a real empirical origin is displaced or totally effaced by the posited origin: “in the oblivion of the male mind, God usurps women as the origin of the oldest belief and makes it sacred” (W. Walker 58). In this aspect of Locke’s theories, a very important educational and epistemological role is attributed to women and especially the mother, the maid or the governess, who are projected as the source of knowledge of all human beings. In this way, Locke designates the woman as the instigator and confirmer of a mental state at the earliest stages of experience (W. Walker 59).

There are constant references to the role of the first female educators of an infant in *Jane Eyre*. Adele refers to her mother who was the first to teach her to “dance and sing, and to say verses” (*JE* 102). As a governess, Jane is going “to teach [Adele] and to make [her] a clever woman some day” (*JE* 101). She is the woman who is going to make up for Adele’s “French defects” by offering her “a sound
English education” (*JE* 450). According to Locke these “defects” are not innate but the outcome of the influence of Adele’s French mother’s early education.⁵⁹

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke frequently points to mothers, maids and governesses, but also to servants in general, as impediments to the education of young gentlemen:

The ideas of Goblines and Sprights have really no more to do with darkness than Light; yet let but a Foolish Maid inculcate these often on the Mind of a Child, and raise them there together, possibly he shall never be able to separate them as long as he lives. (Locke 397-398 qtd in W. Walker 59)

In some cases, for Locke, women are not the victims of superstition but rather its de-mystified manipulators who, knowing superstition to be superstition, implement it in a context of domestic power. When in the *Essay* Locke refers to the “foolish Maid” who inculcates an association of ideas, it is perhaps not that the maid is foolish because she believes in superstition, but because she instigates superstition in the child and this will mark its entire life (W. Walker 59-60).⁶⁰ Charlotte Brontë refers to

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⁵⁹ Many critics have commented on the governess’s ambiguous situation and her rivalry with the mother and wife of the household, who often shows disapproval for the governess (e.g. Poovey 128-130). In *Jane Eyre*, it is the governess who shows disapproval of what the mother has taught her child as in the case of Adele. Jane attributes to Adele “a superficiality of character, inherited probably from her mother, hardly congenial to an English mind” (*JE* 145). On the whole, Jane Eyre’s attitude towards “motherhood” is rather undermining towards the mother. Apart from Celine Varens (Adele’s mother), Mrs Reed is projected as a middle-class, incompetent mother, who is not able to gain her children’s love and appreciation. *Jane Eyre* effaces Jane’s own mother (since Jane the character is motherless), but also Jane undervalues her own motherhood: she refers to her own child only at the end of the novel without any further elaboration on her feelings and thoughts on her role/identity as mother.

⁶⁰ Locke’s designation of the nurse, the old woman and maid as well as the mother, as crucial figures for male infancy presupposes particular circumstances. Lower-class families could not afford a nurse in the seventeenth century. That is to say that the nurse could function as the instigator of belief and first individual only in specific economic and religious domestic contexts. The maid is not so class-specific since in seventeenth-century England, the lower and middle class families often took in children from other families as maids, servants or workers, sometimes in exchange for the service of their own children (W. Walker 66). Therefore it is not just women as biologically defined entities, but women in particular economic and cultural circumstances which Locke identifies as a formative power on infancy (W. Walker 67).
the superstitions of the nursery stories, “the goblins” and “Bessie’s Gytrash” in her account of her first encounter with Rochester:

In those days I was young and all sorts of fancies bright and dark tenanted my mind: the memories of nursery stories were amongst other rubbish; and when they recurred, maturing youth added to them a vigour and vividness beyond what childhood could give. As this horse approached, and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie’s tales wherein figured a north-of-England spirit, called the “Gytrash”; which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travelers, as this horse was now coming upon me. (JE 112)

On one level, Brontë appears to share the sceptical spirit that underlies Locke’s commentary on the nurses’ superstitious stories and their effect on the child’s mind. She points out that these stories not only follow an individual in his/her mature life, but “maturing youth” adds to these stories new emotional freight, “vigour and vividness.” Thus, the maid/governess is an educator who affects an individual immensely and the influence of her teaching and stories survives during the child’s entire life.

Therefore, women are placed very close to the origin of knowledge for every human being and the representation of the mind as a room, an enclosed domestic space alludes to a domestic, feminine element of the mind. We have seen that aspects of Locke’s representation of the mind are incorporated in Brontë’s discussion of the mind, which thus embraces one of the most prominent scientific and epistemic discourses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, there is another aspect in the incorporation of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century epistemic
discourse in *Jane Eyre*: her mind follows a progress form Superstition to Enlightenment.

4. JANE’S PROGRESS FROM “SUPERSTITION” TO “ENLIGHTENMENT”

In *Jane Eyre*, we follow Jane’s ‘pilgrimage’ in reference not only to the events in her life but also in reference to ‘events’ in her mind. Every time that Jane decides to move to a new place and change the direction of her life, she retires to introspection, retreats to an enclosed space, usually a dark room when she can be all alone, where an account of her highly interiorized mental activities is revealed to the reader. This account implies her growing self-knowledge and knowledge of the world. In the early stages of her life, a strong element of superstition provides Jane with a means of interpreting the world “which she learns to cultivate as a form of guidance in her quest for the self and for home” (Byrne 152). Later, the account of her mental processes that lead to important changes in her life shows that Jane’s progress in life is parallel to a progress from superstition and confusion in her mind to the displacement of superstition and her alignment with an ‘enlightened’ way of thinking, a transformation which is realized in a more scientific and male discourse but which leads to a new female epistemology.

As a child she views her mind as “disturbed” and as an enclosed “well” (*JE* 15). The first threat that she faces as a child is “Superstition” (*JE* 14) in the Red Room. In the “darkness” and in the “dense ignorance” of the room, she fights “mental battles” and poses “inward questions” (*JE* 17). The Red Room incident is important in *Jane Eyre* because Jane’s pilgrimage consists of a series of experiences “which are in one way or another, variations of a central, red-room motif of enclosure and escape”
In the account of her mental maturation and the imaging of the mind, the dark room becomes the site of “self recognition” (Alexander and Smith 422) and self-knowledge for Jane, and the ray that penetrates the closed shutters of the dark chamber triggers a process of transformation on Jane’s part, in line with Shuttleworth’s association of the “Red-Room incident” with the “onset of puberty” and menstruation (154, 166). Therefore, it signifies the onset of Jane’s progress in life and her project to learn about herself and the world around her.

At the same time, the Red Room becomes emblematic of Jane’s imagining of the mind. Like the Red/dark room where an eye is struggling to see, the mind in Jane Eyre is represented as a dual entity which consists of a dark enclosed space where an agent struggles to understand, to know. The perceiving agent is Jane’s disembodied “fascinated eye” (JE 16) since Jane, when “catching sight of herself in the mirror (which is present in the dark room) … is not reassured by a comforting specular identification with the physical coherence of her image” (Shuttleworth 154) but rather is paralysed with terror. Jane’s agonizing and disembodied “eye” invokes the interiorized and disembodied (viewing) subject of the Newtonian and Lockean camera obscura, as Jonathan Crary defines it (40).62

After her eight-year ‘servitude’ in Lowood, Jane decides that she wants to “serve elsewhere” (JE 86). Again she retreats to an isolated enclosed space, in a dark room all alone, where she “soliloquized” and she “labour[ed]” mentally (JE 86).63 “A kind

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61 As Gilbert and Gubar point out, Jane’s recollection of the incident takes place at crucial moments throughout the book, for example when she is humiliated by Mr Brocklehurst in Lowood or when she decides to leave Thornfield (341).

62 Jina Politi comments that the red room incident constitutes a significant point of the story during which the subject splits into an ‘I’ and its narrator; it is such a “vertiginous moment” of action and speech that the “rationalising, domesticating voice of narration has to step in” (84).

63 She wished she had a “brain active enough to ferret out the means of attaining it” (JE 86). And then “she ordered her brain to find a response” (JE 86). After that, the answer “came quietly and naturally to [her] mind” (JE 86).
fairy must have dropped the answer” (JE 86) is her conclusion about her epistemology. In the confined, enclosed space of her mind, the distinction between the mental space and the mental agent is clear. First it is herself who as an active agent orders her “brain” to find a solution and then this agent is transformed into a “fairy” who comes to offer the solution. Superstition arises again, however, this time it is not the fear of the ghost of the dead uncle of the Red Room, but a benevolent fairy who saves her and offers her alternatives in her life. This fairy’s answer urges her to move on, to advertise as a governess, an act which inaugurates a new stage in Jane’s life and signals “her first taste of autonomy” in Thornfield (Thormählen 52). At this point, Jane the narrator is transformed into an inquiring agent who “thinks” (JE 86) with almost scientific detachment and poses questions like “What do I want? … How do people do to get a new place? …” (JE 86) to an objectified brain/mind which is expected to “labour” and offer back answers. However, this time the reader starts to wonder: is it really a kind fairy that helps her or is it Jane herself who is the benevolent fairy of her own life/story?64

In the next crucial point of her life, Jane as a young woman faces the truth as soon as Rochester’s attempted bigamy is revealed. Again she retreats in an enclosed space, “shut[s] herself in,” takes off her wedding gown and puts on her old gown:

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64 Laura Morgan Green claims that the voice that tells Jane to advertise as a governess, the voice that tells her to abandon Rochester and the voice that urges her to come back to him are reluctantly recognized by Jane as completely her own, but are thought of as coming from somewhere outside. On the other hand, though, Green sees in Jane’s phrase, “it was my turn to assume ascendancy,” a celebration of the force of imagination. But on the whole, Jane is neither fully autonomous nor condemned to complete isolation since as Green holds “when Jane lacks human interlocutors, these phantasmics compensate for her isolation” (Green 30).
… now I thought: till now I had only heard, seen, moved—followed up and down where I was led or dragged—watched event rush on event, disclosure open beyond disclosure: but now, I thought. (JE 295)

A circular description of her mental activities starts and ends with the process of thinking by one agent, the agent “I.” In this phrase, she rejects the epistemologies of sight and hearing. The passivity of her being the receptor of what other people disclose is rejected, and this leads her to becoming the agent of her own thinking. As she explains, she has already heard the “open admission of the Truth” uttered by Rochester and she has seen the “living proof” of the whole story of her deception, that is Bertha (JE 295). And then she focuses on her own reaction, her own thinking. Her wishes, feelings and thoughts are objects to be looked at and contemplated, in the enclosed mental space again with scientific detachment: she looked at her “cherished wishes” and she “looked at [her] love” (JE 295) for Rochester. And immediately after this she rejects eyesight as a means of approaching the truth: she realizes “how blind had been [her] eyes” (JE 296). “[Her] eyes were covered and closed” (JE 296), the “stainless Truth” has disappeared from Rochester, and Truth becomes something more distant and spiritual/religious, “a remembrance of God” in her “rayless mind.” It is the personification of “her mind [that gives her] the answer—Leave Thornfield at once” (JE 297). Although her agency is reinforced, she does not extricate herself fully from superstition. (Feminine) superstition\textsuperscript{65} appears again in a scene which is in fact a rewriting of the Red-Room scene. Now the moon takes the form of a mother-figure

\textsuperscript{65} Superstition may be considered as a component of femininity which reproduces patriarchal assumptions on gender. However, Brontë does not limit herself into such a conceptualization of superstition, but as I would like to argue, she employs superstition in conjunction with discourses of rationality and Newtonian optics, like the representation of the mind as a camera obscura. In this way she crossfertilizes traditionally feminine and masculine discourses in an attempt to construct an idiosyncratic, even experimental epistemological discourse which is voiced by a female epistemological agent.
who reveals to her what she has to do (JE 319). It is this mother-figure vision which functions as a catalyst that educates her (JE 319) at this point of her narrative. Although Jane foregrounds her own thinking, she is not ready yet to entirely eliminate superstition.

When Jane hears Rochester’s cry, near the end of the book, she is again in a dark room. She is mature now and knows “what it was to be loved” (JE 419); however, ignorance of what is right still prevails in the form of “an inward dimness of vision” (JE 419). The answer to her question about what to do is the eerie/mysterious cry she hears—Rochester’s voice calling her name three times. One could say that this cry establishes superstition as a permanent aspect in Jane’s knowledge of things. However, it seems that Brontë is not at ease with a superstitious frame of mind, and that this is why she has Rochester really utter the name three times at the same time that Jane hears it miles away. I think that this is in line with Jane’s eventual rejection of superstition. When she intensely and with determination exclaims, “Down superstition! … this is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature” (JE 420-my italics), the traditional feminine epistemologies are rejected. Now the knowing subject emerges empowered (“It was my time to assume ascendancy”) “unscared” and most of all “enlightened” (JE 420). As Jane poses it in her own words, the epistemological goal of enlightenment is achieved—Truth/ Nature has overcome “superstition,” “deception” and “witchcraft” (JE 420). Her mental goal is achieved through her enlightenment. And this goal is an exclusively male goal as it is fully compatible with the male-dominated framework of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century.

66 At this point, Jane Eyre “deviates” from superstition and explores more science-like ways, since the phenomenon she describes is very close to what we call today “telepathy” as some critics have pointed out. In fact, Rochester’s cry anticipates “telepathy,” a term which was coined by psychical investigator Frederick W. H. Myers (1843-1901) in an 1882 article in the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (Carroll).
century scientific discourse of Enlightenment. Her movement from superstition to its elimination and to her enlightenment reveals the ultimate scientific goal of the Enlightenment (Outram 94).

In addition, the empowered female knower extends her epistemology to a new, alternative epistemology, that of “groping”: “At any rate it shall be strong enough to search—inquire—to grope an outlet from this cloud of doubt and find an open day of certainty” (*JE* 421). The methodology of her way of knowing is explicitly described as a new, female way of knowing, “to search—inquire—to grope” (421). The old, traditional, female epistemology of witchcraft is blended with groping, a feminine way of touching, which in this framework equates with searching and inquiry. Groping is also justified as a saving option for Rochester in his image of the groping blindman, where his ability to see is replaced by the ability of his hands to grope the world around him and thus “see” in an alternative way. The fact that her method is adopted by Rochester empowers her discourse.

The feminine element of this newly-found epistemology is reinforced by being an “inward sensation” in the “soul’s cell,” an “experience,” a voice which seems part of the subject’s interiority: “it seemed in me” Jane Eyre says, “not in the external world” which seemed more like “an inspiration” (*JE* 421). The primitive female epistemology of “superstition,” “witchcraft,” “deception” is rejected and in its place a new, mature, “enlightened,” feminine epistemology emerges. This new epistemology is defined by the traditional male epistemological values of searching and inquiring which are extended and equated with the feminine elements of groping and inwardness-intuition-instinct. Jane Eyre does not entirely “betray” the tradition of feminine epistemology, but by exploring and incorporating the male tradition of
epistemology of enlightenment she moves on to a more mature and sophisticated female epistemology which defines her as a knower.

The merging of the contemporary constructions of masculine and feminine qualities in the mind is also evident in Jane’s representation of the mind as a domestic space which is to be penetrated. The “penetrating” element/quality of Jane’s mental abilities is recognized by both men who appreciated her (in different ways of course), Rochester and St John. Rochester admires Jane because “there was penetration and power in each glance [Jane] gave” (JE 313-my italics) while St John recognizes “something brave and … penetrating in [Jane’s] eye” (JE 375-my italics). This impalpable quality of bravery and strength in her glance and eyes is a reflection of her brave and powerful mind which proves quite seductive to both men. Jane herself describes her power of penetration as her policy to “pass the outworks” of conventionality and “cross the threshold” (JE 374) into the domestic space of an interesting mind, either male or female. Her policy of penetration is in fact closer to the traditionally male tactics of conquest rather than the feminine manners of seduction. This borrowing from masculine tactics is equivalent to Rochester’s borrowing from Jane’s epistemology when as a groping blindman, he collects ideas with his hands in order to survive (JE 433).

This fusion of masculine and feminine qualities in Jane Eyre’s discussion of the mind seems precursory of the image of the “androgynous” mind as this is exemplified in Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own”:

But the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness? And I went on amateurishly to sketch
a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one
female; and in the man’s brain the man predominates over the woman, and in
the woman’s brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and
comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together,
spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must
have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her.
Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It
is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its
faculties. (Woolf, Part 6)
The fusion of the masculine and feminine qualities in one’s mind takes the form of an
exploration of how the reconciliation between the two “sexes” of the mind can be
achieved. Rochester comes to terms with the feminine side of his mind, because after
his blinding, the only way to receive stimuli from the external world is the feminine
epistemology of groping which helps him survive until the partial recovery of his
eyesight. At the same time, Jane, the governess, whose sexuality is never
foregrounded, manages to experience an “enlightenment” by incorporating a male
discourse, by impregnating her feminine epistemology with the male scientific
discourse of the eighteenth century and the result is a newly-found, “enlightened”
feminine epistemology.

So, the governess negotiates the gender of the mind. She talks of the merging
of male and female qualities of the mind and of alternative-female epistemologies.
But is gender neutrality really possible? The image of Jane who can be penetrating in
her perception of the world around her, and who can develop a new feminine
epistemology which incorporates and extends a male epistemological discourse of
enlightenment, as well as the image of Rochester as the groping blindman, may be Brontë’s version of the merging of genders in the mind.

5. THE GOVERNESS’S MIND: JANE EYRE, THE OTHER WOMEN IN THE NOVEL AND EPISTEMIC AGENCY

Jane’s epistemic agency is also placed in the context of other women’s epistemic viewpoints. Jane juxtaposes her subjectivity as a knower to other women-knowers in the novel. She learns from them but she does not wholly embrace their ways of knowing the world. In the end, by effacing their epistemic power, she elevates her own subjectivity, her epistemic agency and her enlightened way of thinking. Thus, her new epistemology is also defined not only by what it is but also by what it is not.

Jane Eyre as a governess, as a knowing agent, is situated in multiple locations. The idiosyncratic social position of the governess is well known and has been extensively analysed by Brontë critics. The governess occupied an “anomalous position,” as I have already mentioned, and experienced what Peterson called “status incongruence,” that is, the tension experienced by the governess because of the fact that she was usually middle-class and therefore not a servant, but at the same time she was an employee, therefore not of an equal status with the wife and the daughters of the house where she worked (Peterson 11). At the same time the presence of the governess was a threat to the Victorians because she reminded them of the “tremendous financial fluidity” of that time—since she was usually herself a middle-class woman who had to work as the result of some, usually financial, family misfortune (Brandon 13). In addition, her presence posed the crucial question of what the woman’s place in the world was; in a Victorian society that recognized marriage
and motherhood as the middle-class woman’s only “career,” the governess was a threat, because she implied the possibility of an alternative, a working woman (Brandon 13).

Many discussions have emerged concerning the governess’s self-control and sexual availability. This danger surfaced in the images of governesses in Victorian literature and Poovey cites Jane Eyre as such an example (128). The governess formed a threat to the wife of the house not only in sexual terms (as a young, dependent woman who could seduce the men in the house), but she was also thought to “usurp mother’s place” since she spent most of the day in close proximity with the children, thus instigating envy and jealousy on the part of the mother who found ways to undermine the governess’s authority (Brandon 9-12; Lecaros 208-209).

As a governess, Jane Eyre occupied both a peripheral and a marginalized position, as a foreign and threatening presence in both the bourgeois family and the social stratification of her time, but at the same time she was central in the production and the transmission of knowledge because of her role as an educator. It is this characteristic, that is, her well-developed mental capacity and the fact that she appreciates knowledge and education, that Jane uses to empower herself in her narration, often at the expense of the other women in the novel.

Jane predominates over the other women of the novel on the grounds of her identity as a governess, showing off her mind which is superior in comparison to other women’s mental capacities and foregrounding her role as an epistemic agent. This is not overt; Jane does not show off her knowledge or make an extensive reference to her work as a governess or schoolmistress. But she shows off her quick spirit, her mental capacities, exhibiting ‘a desire to know’ and developing a new alternative, “enlightened” female epistemology. Therefore, she constructs her
subjectivity as a knowing agent, as an educator who is being educated through experience and by other men, and most of all by other women in the novel, whom she uses to learn, and to define herself against and whom she eventually surpasses. On the one hand, she stresses the impossibility of a unified female viewpoint, and at the same time she offers an alternative way of knowing for a woman.

The first two women who play a vital role in Jane’s education are Miss Temple and Helen Burns at Lowood school. They are the first of the two examples of “a homosocial, female intellectual community that might sustain rather than entrap Jane,” a community in which Jane participates in order to compensate for her intellectual and social isolation (Green 30). The second example is that of the Rivers sisters at Marsh End. In both cases, Jane begins by assuming the role of the “admiring disciple” (Green 30). Miss Temple represents a domestic ideal and functions as a maternal figure for Jane (Green 33). She is the wise, benevolent teacher who is sensitive to the sufferings of the girls in Lowood and who effectively subverts Mr Brocklehurst’s male authority, even though she does not explicitly express her anger or challenge him (Hanley 10). However, as soon as Miss Temple gets married, an indication that she complies to the Victorian expectations of women and the traditional ideal of the “angel in the house,” Jane surpasses her:

From the moment she (Miss Temple) left I was no longer the same: with her was gone every settled feeling … my mind had put off all that it had borrowed of Miss Temple … I was left in my natural element. (JE 84, my italics).

Jane seems to proclaim that education can be unnatural, seeking to find her own voice and will, her “natural element,” as she says, even beyond maternal guidance and education. Miss Temple’s instruction, the “settled feelings,” and the settled viewpoint of life are not enough for Jane, who settles for a quest for her own voice.
The other member of the pair of Jane’s ‘educators’ at Lowood, her friend Helen Burns, is a highly spiritual creature, dedicated to her religious beliefs. There was the tendency in the mid-nineteenth century to read her as the perfect character (Imlay 131, 133). Helen serves as an educator and as a model for Jane. But as Elizabeth Imlay holds, Brontë “champions what is fully human” and tends to “reject solutions which are too animal or too spiritual” (133). Although Helen’s viewpoint of life is chaste and noble it is also too spiritual. Helen has rejected her body, a female way of knowing, and as a result she is eliminated in the text, and Jane, having her example in mind, moves on to the next stage in her life. Although Jane uses both Miss Temple and Helen as examples to overcome the passionate rage that she so often had exhibited in Gateshead (Hanley 11), in due course she moves away from them and looks for other alternatives.

The Rivers sisters, whom Jane meets at a later point in her life, are quite a different example. They offer Jane shelter, love and inspiration, help her and educate her, but in the end it is Jane who saves them from their dependency as governesses with her inherited amount of money. They represent a version of what Jane would have been if she had not been ambitious, revolutionary or bold enough to follow her own instinct, rebel against her fate and invent ways to extricate herself from the ambiguous social position of the governess.

Jane’s cousins Eliza and Georgiana, Blanche Ingram and Rosamond Oliver are representatives of the upper-middle class which treats governesses as outcasts. According to Jane, their knowledge and way of knowing the world is superficial and conceited. Furthermore, their mental abilities are presented as restricted. For example, Jane’s rival for Rochester’s love, Miss Ingram, is described by Jane as inadequate in relation to her own mental abilities: “she was very showy, but she was not genuine;
she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature” (*JE* 185).

Bertha and everything that she represents according to many critical readings (for instance as the exotic, the Colonial Other, or Jane’s dark Double, an embodiment of Jane’s suppressed passions and desires) is projected in the text as mentally inferior to Jane, even before her mental illness. Rochester dismisses Bertha’s mind as insufficient in spatial terms; it is “common, low, narrow and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger” (*JE* 306). The description of Bertha’s mental insufficiency is part of the construction of what Edward Said has termed the “Colonial Other” against which Europeans defined themselves (Said qtd in Alexander and Smith 398). In this framework, Jane poses herself as mentally superior to Bertha, thus fighting back what Spivak terms the native subject’s (Bertha’s) “terrorism” (248). Even when Bertha was sane, she was mentally inferior to Jane, and it is the “seemingly paradoxical internal discord” of “pigmy intellect” and “giant propensities” that bring on madness to Bertha, according to Sue Thomas (Thomas 6).

In addition, the discourse of the mind in the novel constructs a pattern which lies at the core of the erotic story that Jane narrates. The mind itself is represented as a treasure. As Rochester tells Jane, “your mind is my treasure, and if it were broken, it would be my treasure still” (*JE* 301). Therefore, Jane bifurcates her erotic narrative by posing her “treasure”—that is her precious mind—against her rivals’ “poor” and “narrow” minds. Thus her “treasure” emerges as the only matching option for Rochester’s “original, vigorous and expanded mind” (*JE* 252). Therefore, erotic exchange and matching in *Jane Eyre* is constructed on a site of competing and contrasting minds, where Charlotte Brontë justifies and empowers her heroine at the

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67 Also, Jane justifies her union with Rochester when she states that something in her brain, heart, blood and nerves “assimilates [her] mentally to him” (*JE* 175).
expense of her two other rivals, Bertha and Miss Ingram. At the same time, Jane 
rejects the epistemology of two basic poles against which she defines her own ways of 
knowing: first Bertha as the archetypal negative female power, which is irrational, 
vviolent and perverse (Imlay 53) as well as the exotic Creole Other. On the other hand, 
there is the middle-class, conceited and superficial lady, who is degraded to an 
“object” to be used by men (e.g. Blanche Ingram is used by Rochester to provoke 
Jane’s jealousy) or who is not taken seriously by men (e.g. Rosamond Oliver is not 
considered suitable as a missionary’s wife by St John Rivers).

6. CONCLUSION

Jane Eyre uses the other women of the novel to learn from them and then becomes 
such a potent knowing agent that she surpasses them and stands on top of them. She 
does this, in order to reinforce not only her own subjectivity but also her new-found 
feminine epistemology. This new epistemology is neither Ingram’s superficial 
epistemology of the middle-class woman, nor Bertha’s insane, violent, full of passion 
perception; it is neither Miss Temple’s compromised epistemology nor Helen’s 
almost non-human, transcendental, spiritual epistemology which rejects the body. 
Although she learns from all these perspectives, Jane does not fully embrace those 
women’s viewpoints, but instead she develops her own epistemology which emanates 
from the cross-fertilization of the male and female elements of the mind. By 
incorporating Lockean representations of the mind and by tracing the path to 
enlightenment, she defines a new female epistemology where groping/touching is 
defined as inquiring and knowing, and intuition is not identical with witchcraft and 
deception anymore.
Chapter Four

Self-education and the Mind: Caroline’s Camera Obscura in the Poly-Prismatic Narrative of Charlotte Brontë’s Shirley

Shirley is a novel which foregrounds the multiperspectivity of narration and the multidimensionality of its literary construction. It is a text where the female protagonist is split in two, Caroline and Shirley, the narrative is full of embedded texts and constructed through various points of view which resemble a multicoloured narrative spectrum. This spectrum exposes the representation of the mind as an enclosed space, a camera obscura where both feminine and masculine ways of perception fuse, as well as objective types of vision merge with subjective points of view.

However, it is not easy to track down a coherent line of progress, transformation or negotiation of the mental space within the subjectivity of a single main female character in this novel. This is because in Shirley, the narration is not presented from a specific viewpoint, that of the main character, as is the case in the rest of Charlotte Brontë’s novels, Jane Eyre, The Professor and Villette. Instead, the narration in Shirley is presented from the viewpoint of a third-person narrator, whereas the main female characters of the novel are “split” in two. As Parkin-Gounelas explains, Shirley is outspoken and defiant of female subjectivity, she introduces that which most women of her time suppress, whereas Caroline’s role was to “soften” Shirley’s views with tones of acceptance and respectability, and bring them closer to Victorian readers’ expectations of novelistic depictions of womanhood (44). However, in Shirley, Brontë loses much of the effect of the internal conflict, by “externalising division in two rather than in the one highly internalised character”
(Parkin-Gounelas 46). In this chapter, I focus on Caroline but Shirley is also present to foreshadow, support or oppose Caroline’s life and thinking. Thus, the two characters function as a unit exemplifying conflicts and oppositions, although this juxtaposition compared to the force of the inner conflict of a single subject is significantly weakened. As Parkin-Gounelas holds, “the split into two heroines has deprived the text of the opportunity to explore the internal conflict that animates Brontë’s most successful heroines, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe” (45).

Structurally, *Shirley* is a more innovative work than the rest of Charlotte Brontë’s novels since it deliberately eschews any kind of unity of focus and voice (Shuttleworth 187). As Sally Shuttleworth explains, in this novel there is “no comfort of an autobiographical account in which the continuity of voice acts to maintain an illusion of the continuity of subject” (187). Therefore, discontinuity is evident and could be viewed as an indication of Brontë’s experimentation with a text which is split across divided sites and multiple protagonists; also its language is split, “mingling economic analyses, invocations of visions, wraiths, and spirits” (Shuttleworth 187). So, it is division and uncertainty that characterize both the four principal protagonists, “who seem to be defined less by any centre of selfhood than by their positioning in relation to each other” (Shuttleworth 187), as well as the society described in the novel. As Taylor puts it, “Brontë takes two heroines, to reflect different crises for women in a male world itself in crisis” (89). Thus, the reader is presented with a variety of points of view “which are countered and challenged, and ironically or humorously portrayed” (Glen, *Cambridge Companion* 125):

What drove Brontë to *Shirley* was not a naïve desire to acquaint herself with the ‘issues of the day’, but a far more sophisticated sense that such ‘issues’ are refracted, always through contesting voices and perspectives; that calm
objectivity, or even simple fidelity to the fact, are perhaps simply chimerical.

(Glen, *Cambridge Companion* 126)

Critical response to *Shirley* was almost the same throughout the nineteenth century: readers and critics criticized the novel on the grounds of the improbabilities of the plot, weakness of characterization, lack of the kind of excitement that was found in *Jane Eyre*, and even dedicated admirers of Charlotte Brontë considered *Shirley* as a work uneven in worth to *Jane Eyre*, which had little to add to Charlotte’s reputation (Alexander and Smith 470). Heather Glen traces the reasons for phenomena of disunity and disjunction in *Shirley*’s close association to the Brontë juvenilia tradition. Irony and abrupt shifts in scene and character, romantic expectations which are mocked, heroic passions which are not presented in a heroic manner and a variety of points of view which are countered and challenged (Glen, *Cambridge Companion* 125) are all features which are also encountered in Brontë’s early writings (Glen, *Imagination* 146).

So, *Shirley* exemplifies the function of a literary spectrum, and as I would like to argue, in *Shirley*, a “polyprismatic” quality of the narrative is more evident due to the way it is written, and more specifically due to the function of the narrator and the dialogic way in which issues like class and gender are addressed. This prismatic narrative enables Brontë to discuss issues like politics, the Industrial Revolution, the Luddite riots, historical, social and educational matters from various viewpoints. All these aspects of the context in which the plot of the novel is set are aspects of the reality that is reflected in her text. Brontë herself describes the aim of her writing *Shirley* in the beginning of the novel:

If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and
poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto. (S 5, my italics)

So, Brontë clearly states her intention to render “cool” and “solid” reality in her novel, and thus Shirley becomes her experiment in realism. Her narrative deals with contemporary issues of social unrest, political and economic crisis. Her narrator also states the intention to “depict reality” by denouncing imagination as falsifying the originality of the rendering of reality into words:

You must not think, reader, that in sketching Miss Ainley’s character, I depict a figment of imagination—no—we seek the originals of such portraits in real life only. (S 183)

However, Brontë’s answer to the question of how “something real, cool, and solid” adhering to reality should be written, is a novel which includes imagination, the “sentiments,” the “passion” and the “romance” of the love stories of the four protagonists which are at the core of the novel, the “reverie” of the narratives of fantasy like “the woman-Titan,” the “mermaids” or “The First Blue-Stocking,” as well as the embedded “poetry,” all things which she intended to avoid at least in theory as she stated in her first chapter. So, even if in theory she considered them unsuitable elements, in practice she uses them in her project of realistic representation. Therefore, Shirley registers the difference that is located between the way that “realism has been theorized and the way it is now seen as having been practiced,” as Despotopoulou and Kitsi-Mitakou argue (9). And this means that these elements which were considered as unsuitable to render a representation of reality, in
fact convey aspects of reality in an alternative and experimental way. Brontë voices her need for alternative ways to express herself which complement traditional approaches to reality, when Shirley explains: “I’ll borrow of imagination what reality won’t give me” (S 302). Shirley seems to belong to the “hybrid genre” that realism produces through experimentation with form and the interrogation of dominant ideologies resulting thus in the destabilization rather than the reinforcement of “polarities such as inside/outside, closure/indeterminacy, visibility/invisibility, truth/artifice” as Despotopoulou and Kitsi-Mitakou contend (8-9).

In Shirley, the heterogeneous mind draws on images of the camera obscura and is reflected on a prismatic text. At the core of this heterogeneity there is an educational component, which defines heterogeneity as a discord with the environment and as a process which fosters harmony of oneself with him/ herself (Thormählen 4). In this narrative of education, the unrest of the constant need for life change highlights the quest of knowledge and self-education.

1. THE MULTIPLE COLOURS OF THE NARRATIVE VOICE IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S SHIRLEY

The voice that narrates a story does not always follow a consistent linear course in its accounting of the events of the plot. Its route may have deviations from the main course, constant shifts and changes, which lead to a merging or collision of voices, the interruption of the narrative or its transformation via different means of discourse.

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68 In this framework of experimentation we should include the aforementioned split of the main heroine in two distinct heroines, the discussion of political and social issues which do not traditionally belong to the sphere of interest of a female author.
The result of this process is the construction of a “spectrum” of colours which invests the imagery and the ideology of the novel.

Gisela Argyle explains that since the 1970s, criticism has described the narrative voice of *Shirley* as not-unified. This is because it is characterized by constant disruptions, disjunctions and fragmentation (742). In her attempt to explore this issue, she proposes to read the novel in terms of “three distinct although not always separable generic modes” (Argyle 744); these are the comedy of manners, as typified by Jane Austen, the historical romance as typified by Scott and the psychological romance as typified by Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (Argyle 743). Traits of all three genres can be explored in the narrator’s relation to the characters and the reader, in the characterization, in the plot and in the imagery of *Shirley* (Argyle 744). Besides, in *Shirley*, there is a “disturbingly dual voice” since this struggle resulted from Brontë’s acceptance of conventional novelistic language, particularly in the form of narrative syntax or plot combined with the shifts in the linguistic signs for characters involved which subvert it (Ingham 33). For instance, Caroline and her mother Mrs Pryor were perceived as the unwomanly woman and the unmaternal mother (as criticized by Lewes) (Ingham 32). In addition, Heather Miner argues that in *Shirley*, generic dichotomies and the disparity between art and politics are challenged, and in doing so, Brontë manages to restructure the form of the industrial novel (3).

Apart from the three distinct genres which can be identified in the text of *Shirley* and underline the non-unitary quality of the narrating voice of the novel, as well as the disjunction between conventional plot and unconventional characters, there is also the feminist conviction that the quality of the female voice is inherently polyphonic as I already mentioned in the introduction to my thesis. According to
Susan Lanser, the female voice\textsuperscript{69} is polyphonic because on one level it conforms to male rhetoric and on another level it undermines it. It hovers between subordination and authority, between private and public. Lanser, by referring to Bakhtin’s polyphony, holds that this polyphony is “more pronounced and more consequential in women’s narratives and in the narratives of other dominated peoples” (Lanser qtd in Herman and Vervaeck 138).

Therefore, in this framework it is interesting to follow the course of the narrator’s voice in Charlotte Brontë’s novel \textit{Shirley}. It leads us to the construction of a “multicoloured” narrator who functions on various and different levels. At this point it is interesting to note that there are no clear references to the gender of \textit{Shirley’s} narrator. I prefer to refer to him as a male narrator on the basis of the comment: “the novelist may be excused from sullying his page with the record of their deeds” (S 61) which although ambiguous, I consider as a discreet, self-referential comment on the narrator’s male gender on the part of Charlotte Brontë. So, questions arise regarding his function such as, is he an external narrator or a character-bound narrator? The narrator’s voice in \textit{Shirley} seems to be quite flexible. The way the narrator functions constantly changes. He could be described as an external narrator because he is not a character in the story. Still, he implicitly assumes the role of the actor and like some kind of actor, invisible to the characters of the scene, he “will talk aside” (S 6) with the narratee. In addition, he invites the reader to follow him, and again like invisible spirits they both enter the scene, they become part of the narrative and “stoop over … [the character’s] shoulder and read as… [the character] scribbles” (S 521). Although the narrator withdraws behind the third-person narration, on many occasions he becomes perceptible through a self-referential “I”:

\textsuperscript{69} As I have already mentioned, though, this is not always the case, since there are female characters in Charlotte Brontë’s novels who reproduce patriarchal stereotypes.
Of late years, I say, an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England .... You shall see them, reader. Step into this neat garden-house on the skirts of Whinbury, walk forward into the little parlour—there they are at dinner. Allow me to introduce them to you ... You and I will join the party, see what is to be seen, and hear what is to be heard. At present, however, they are only eating; and while they eat we will talk aside. (S 5, 6)

In addition, the “colour” of the narrator’s identity changes throughout the novel. The narrator introduces and labels himself as the novelist (S 61) but we see him undertaking other roles, too. For instance, he undertakes the role of a painter who “snatches the opportunity to sketch the portrait” of Mr. Moore (S 45); the role of a teacher commenting on the educative power of experience in life (S 98, 99) or correcting the “orthography” of the text and rewriting it “into legible English” (S 33); the role of a translator who translates “the answer and the rest of the conversation” from French into English because “this is an English book” (S 63); or the role of the historian or journalist who comments on the social and political context of the novel (S 166-167) conveying his own ideological stances.

If we follow Wayne Booth’s distinction between “dramatised/undramatised narrators” (145,146), we can describe Shirley’s narrator as a “dramatized narrator,” that is, a personality easily perceptible in his own right, although he is not a character in the story. Yet, there are constant shifts in this function: like when he is a “narrator-agent” who participates in the action as if he were a character. For instance, in the phrase: “we are privileged to enter the front-door, and to penetrate the domestic sanctum” (S 146) the narrator is such a “privileged” and dominant presence in the text, that he appears invested with a body (since he is able to move into the setting) and, moreover, he has the power to draw the narratee/reader into the scene. In another
case, he addresses the reader in a straightforward manner, admonishing him or her like in the following example:

Reader! When you behold an aspect for whose constant gloom and frown you cannot account, whose unvarying cloud exasperates you by its apparent causelessness, be sure that there is a canker somewhere, and a canker not the less deeply corroding because concealed. (S 180)

In other cases, his voice does not support the characters. For example in the phrase “what I have just said are Caroline’s ideas…” (S 252), he distances himself from Caroline’s character, since he announces his distance from her thoughts. However, in long sections of the novel the narrator stands apart as an “observer” describing the characters’ actions, ideas and feelings. Shirley’s narrator seems to be more omnipresent than omniscient, in the sense that he conveys the thoughts of other characters based more on his inferences from what he witnesses (for example descriptions of their facial expressions and what he infers from watching them) rather than on a free access to the characters’ minds. In addition, the characters’ points of view and opinions are conveyed mainly by means of dialogue (and not solely through the narrator’s commentary). The characters themselves express their perspectives and feelings and their dialogues provide us with an insight to what they are thinking.

There are occasions where the narrator’s voice merges with the characters’ voices mostly in order to support them. For example as Dorrit Cohn explains, in the case of consonant psychonarration, the disparity between the narrating and the figural (character’s) consciousness may be less distinct than expected: there are no speculations, no explanatory comments and no distancing appellations on part of the narrator (31). Besides, reported speech and phrases like “he thought that” are avoided.
In these cases, the narrator is still reporting but his narration “denotes inner happenings” of the consciousness of the character (Cohn 31). For example:

[Caroline’s] thoughts were speaking with her: speaking pleasantly, as it seemed, for she smiled as she listened. She looked pretty, meditating thus: but a brighter thing than she was at that apartment—the spirit of youthful Hope. According to this flattering prophet, she was to know disappointment, to feel chill no more: she had entered on the dawn of a summer day—no false dawn, but the true spring of morning—and her sun would quickly rise. Impossible for her now to suspect that she was the sport of delusion: her expectations seemed warranted, the foundations on which they rested appeared solid. (S 99)

The merging of the voices of the narrator and the character is predominantly exemplified in cases of Free Indirect Discourse and it performs various functions. For example, the narrator’s voice merges with William Farren’s voice who expresses indignation against Moore: “How could Moore leave him, thus…” (S 138), and in this way the narrator expresses his support to Farren:

[Robert Moore’s] last words had left a bad, harsh impression: he, at least, had “failed in the disposing of the chance her was lord of.” By speaking kindly to William Farren—who was a very honest man, without envy or hatred of those more happily circumstanced than himself … Moore might have made a friend … The poor fellow’s face looked haggard with want: … it was worn, dejected, austere, but still patient. How could Moore leave him thus, with the words “I’ll never give in,” and not a whisper of good-will, or hope, or aid? (S 138)

In other cases, FID is employed as a technique to attribute vivacity and dramatic power to the text as in the case of Martin. In this case, the tense of the narrative has already changed from past into present, and it is not clear whether the phrase “Hush!
Shut the book: hide it in the satchel” (S 568) is uttered by the narrator or Martin himself.

Moreover, in *Shirley*, there are numerous occasions of embedded texts, which are mainly long descriptions, dialogues, but also poems, which interrupt the narrating voice and function as alternatives to it. In the embedded diary entry by Mr Louis (S 610-625), it is Louis himself who narrates the mutual confessions of romantic feelings both on his and Shirley’s part. In this case, the narrator’s voice changes its colour/identity and it is transformed into the voice of one of the characters. This technique enhances the credibility of the text and empowers the intensity of the romantic feelings of the characters. This happens because their emotions appear to be expressed directly by the characters themselves and not by the intervening consciousness of an external narrator. At the same time, there is a shift in the position of the novel’s narrator since he is turned into a narratee himself.

Another example of embedded narration is Mr Moore’s reciting of Shirley’s composition in French (S 485-490) in the chapter entitled “The First Blue-stocking.” In this case there is the merging of three voices. The narrator’s voice is transformed into a composition/narration written by a female character (Shirley) which is recited/voiced by a male character (Louis Moore). In other words a male voice (Louis) reproduces a female text (Shirley’s) of feminist content (the first blue-stocking/Eva). This way, the narrator is exempted from a quite provocative text and its ideological implications. At the same time, though, Shirley is empowered as the model of the independent, strong “blue-stocking” with the support of the voice of her male tutor.

As Mieke Bal explains, embedded texts can contain a suggestion on how the story should be read (*Narratology* 147). The aforementioned instance exemplifies such a
function. The embedded short text is the allegory of a disadvantaged female figure who survives despite difficulties and in the end is justified. The story of “The First Blue-stockings” is a metaphor that mirrors the whole novel: both Shirley and Caroline (or the two aspects of the female protagonist of the novel, as already mentioned) are orphan girls, they both overcome difficulties and survive, and in the end a soothing change comes into their lives leading to marriage and happiness.

What is more, the narrator’s voice can transform and continue to narrate through a different medium like poetry. For example, in the “Valley of the Shadow of Death” chapter, the seriously ill, almost dying Caroline, who is nursed by Mrs Pryor, is talking about making her will (S 420). Immediately after this, Caroline asks to listen to two hymns/poems which talk about a refuge, a haven, and they both conclude with the word “home.” In the following pages, Caroline’s quest for a home is answered. The answer comes with the revelation of the true identity of Mrs Pryor, who is Caroline’s real mother (her Home). The change that Caroline so eagerly asked for has come and this is voiced by Caroline herself: “But if you are my mother, the world is all changed to me” (S 434).

The two poems quoted immediately before the scene of Mrs Pryor’s revelation of her true identity, implicitly voice Caroline’s quest for a home and foreshadow the forthcoming disclosure. Besides, the “colour” of Mrs Pryor’s voice changes throughout the novel. The revelation of her true identity as the mother of Caroline changes our perspective of her and also the way we have perceived her so far. The image of the governess merges with the motherly figure.

The constant changes and transformations of the narrative voice as well as the merging and blending of the narrators’ and the characters’ voices in a literary text, formulate a network which implicitly and explicitly constructs the imagery and ideological implications of this text. One of the prominent images in Shirley, which is
constructed by means of this “spectrum” of various voices, is the image of the educator and the idea of education. And this becomes clear if we consider that the main colour/aspect of the voice of Shirley’s narrator is that of a teacher. He corrects the phrasing of one of the characters (S 134), admonishes his narratees (S 180), or even teaches his narratees the way to read and analyze a poem that he includes in his narration (S 226). In the first part of the last chapter, the narrator addresses the curates (S 632-635) as if they were pupils in his classroom. In phrases like, “No, Peter Augustus we have nothing to say to you…” or “Make way for Mr Sweeting…” or “Advance, Mr Donne…”, the narrator-teacher, addresses the characters-pupils, recapitulates what we know about them, foretells their future and teaches them lessons about their lives. Furthermore, through the narrative voice, since it is not easy to make a distinction between the author and the narrator, Brontë seems to desire to be her readers’ mentor and to educate them (Menon 116). We should not ignore that the most powerful “I” in Shirley is that of the narrative voice, which takes the role of mentor to the reader (Menon 114) apart from assuming the role of a teacher in various occasions, as already seen.

So, the voice of the main narrator constantly diverges from a linear route, merges or collides with other voices or transforms by using other means of expression like embedded poems. These constant shifts and changes lead to a “prismatic” effect of the literary text which reveals the various and different colours of its imagery and its ideological implications. The narrative deviates from a linear course, expected routes and predetermined directions. This change of route reflects the shift of a ray from its linear course as described by Newton in his Opticks:

Refrangibility of the Rays of Light, is their Disposition to be refracted or turned out of their Way in passing out of one transparent body or Medium into another.
And a greater or less Refrangibility of Rays, is their Disposition to be turned more or less out of their Way like in Incidences on the same Medium (*Opticks* Book 1, Part 1, Definition 2).

The notion of change is an important issue in *Shirley*. It is reflected on the multicoloured spectrum of the narrative, with changes and shifts on various levels as already described. Also, on another level it is textualized in Caroline’s desire for a change in her own life and in her personal quest for knowledge and self-education. She does not really know what to change in her life but she does know that “[she] needs a change” (S 189) and this desire is the motivating force behind her epistemological quest. In addition, the “refrangibility” from a linear route takes the form of changes on social and economic levels which are reflected also on the natural environment which changes due to industrial progress, something that becomes more evident in the final pages of the novel.

2. THE ‘SPECTRUM’ OF CLASS AND GENDER ISSUES IN THE CAMERA OBSCURA OF *SHIRLEY’S NARRATIVE*

The narrative spectrum in *Shirley* reveals perspectives and voices which touch upon issues of the social sphere like politics, social unrest, industry, religion and history. This discussion merges with the discussion of issues which belong to the private and domestic sphere and are expected to be dealt with by a female writer like love, family, marriage, the education and occupation of women. To these we could also add scientific discourse, like in the case of the “electric passage” (S 188) which Caroline experienced in her veins when she saw Moore together with Shirley. So, the narrative spectrum reveals how the social and the private merge and coincide in a network of
discourses which, on the one hand, are centripetal and attempt to retain the established order and, on the other hand, are centrifugal and emerge in an attempt to question and rebel against the establishment.

The historical and social background of the era is very important here since Brontë, although in one of her letters she claims that “politics are not [her] study” (qtd in Rogers 162), in fact discusses politics in *Shirley*. According to Philip Rogers, her political thought is Tory, conservative and influenced by Duke Wellington, although many contemporary critics would like to think of her as a rebel, following Mary Wollstonecraft. Elizabeth Rigby, for example, accused her of “foster[ing] Chartism and rebellion at home” in *Jane Eyre* (Rogers 163).

On the whole, the social context which informed *Shirley’s* socio-economic and political framework was largely influenced by the Luddite riots and Chartism. As Alexander and Smith explain, the Luddite riots took place in 1811-12, when the West Yorkshire woollen trade, the Lancashire cotton trade, and the East Midlands hosiery trade centred on Nottingham experienced attacks on mills and the destruction of machinery (309). The machine-breakers targeted specific factories and workshops because of the use of new machinery, changes in production standards, or harsh employers (Alexander and Smith 309). They were fuelled by political radicalism of the early 1800s and by economic hardship, as well as by the decision of

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70 Generally, Duke Wellington sought to suppress working-class protest (Rogers 152) and he embraced unambiguously Tory principles, since among his aims were the preservation of public order, the defense of traditional English institutions, aristocratic privilege, and property rights, which in his view collectively comprised “the constitution” (Rogers 153). In *Shirley*, there is almost an idolizing of Duke Wellington who represented the heroic counterforce of tradition (Rogers 158). In 1848, when Brontë was writing the early chapters of *Shirley*, the wave of revolutions in Europe and the Chartist demonstrations in England prompted her to comment specifically on working-class rebellion (Rogers 159). Duke Wellington was the model on which Robert Moore was fashioned (Rogers 166). Moore’s defense of the Hollow’s Mill, repeated Wellington’s strategy of concealed force (Rogers 167). Rogers claims that both Louis and Robert Moore were reconstructed as two complementary models which were shaped to conform to Wellington’s image, invoking his contrasting dualities: stern authority tempered by humane warmth (Rogers 151).
manufacturers to reduce costs by dismissal of workers, lower wages and especially to introduce machinery and techniques that made skilled workers redundant (Alexander and Smith 309). The Brontë children were familiar from a young age with stories of the Luddites because their father, Rev. Patrick Brontë held curacies in areas affected by the riots and risings (Alexander and Smith 309). Many critics, like Alexander and Smith as well as Rogers, hold that it was also Chartism (in the mid-century) which informed Charlotte Brontë’s recreation of the earlier Luddite riots in *Shirley* (Alexander and Smith 121). Chartism was a workers’ movement which attempted to gain more bargaining power on behalf of the workers (Alexander and Smith 121). Their demands were embodied in the People’s Charter, which was published in May 1838 and which included six points, like the annual parliament, universal male suffrage, equal electoral districts, removal of the property qualification for MPs, the secret ballot and payment of MPs (Alexander and Smith 121).

The Luddites and the factory workers are closely related to aspects of female representation in *Shirley*. As Zlotnik explains, factory work became synonymous with female employment which was seen as illicit or immoral, because not only did it take women out of home, but it frequently placed them in direct competition with male handworkers (Zlotnik 289-290). Such a situation, Zlotnik continues, led to a gendering of the social chaos as it was experienced by people in the middle decades of the nineteenth century (289). This is so, because it was factory work which gave women the opportunity or forced them to work out of the domestic sphere and turned them into independent wage earners, thus threatening the traditional patterns of male domination both in the workplace and the home (Zlotnik 290). However, this was not the case with middle-class women who could not work in the factories and thus faced a scarcity of employment opportunities (Zlotnik 290).
The Brontës, according to Terry Eagleton, occupied an ambiguous position in the social structure of their society: they were daughters of a clergyman of inferior status, they strove to maintain the “genteel” standards of their environment and they belonged to the oppressed group of isolated, educated women (8). In addition, their job as governesses resulted in a peculiar social standing. A governess moved to higher social circles, but was introduced to this society, in which she desired to belong, as a servant; however, she was culturally superior to the people she had to serve (Eagleton 10). According to Eagleton, that ambiguity was structural to the Brontës’ fiction: on the one hand, the Brontës respected and sympathized with the hard-working, victimized and dispossessed people because of their own need to earn a living, but on the other hand, they admired the “civilized delicacy where they spiritually belonged” (13).

Eagleton believes that the central event of the story of Shirley, which is the raid on Moore’s Mill, is empty (47). This is because the working class, its major protagonist, is invisible at that moment (49). The whole incident is “seen/watched” by the girls, Caroline and Shirley, who in fact don’t see anything but only hear (Eagleton 48). At this point, it is interesting to note, as Helen Taylor claims, that women too are invisible at this central event because they are hidden. Taylor argues that the two central subjects of the novel, that is, class and gender, are remarkable for the invisibility of their representatives at the most crucial incident of its story (86).

On the whole, Eagleton holds that Shirley is constructed as a “hybrid of progressive capitalist and traditional landowner” (51). He claims that in fact Brontë, as a “petty bourgeois intellectual” (Eagleton 7) is not interested in the working class and its problems, but in the tensions, alliances and the fusion of interests between the two social structures which dominated her world: the industrial bourgeoisie and the
landed gentry or aristocracy (Eagleton 4). Eventually, Shirley attempts to occupy the compromising middle ground between extremes like reverence and rebellion, land and trade, gentry and bourgeoisie (Eagleton 60), instead of attempting a revolutionary breakthrough in order to undermine the social structure of its time.

Helen Taylor, taking into consideration Eagleton’s study, offers a feminist point of view on reading Shirley, which differs in many respects from Eagleton’s Marxist approach. She claims that in Shirley, Brontë is mainly engaged in examining the plight of oppressed bourgeois women from the perspective of and by analogy with the struggle of the working class (87). Throughout the novel, the Luddites and women are parallel because each group is under-employed, oppressed and silenced by the ruling class of the bourgeois males (Taylor 91). And Taylor goes on to argue that, imprisoned within her time Brontë could not imagine anything else more suitable for a wealthy and independent woman landowner than marrying the man she chose to love (90).

Sally Shuttleworth places the analogy between the situation of “surplus” middle-class woman and that of the unemployed worker in the center of the structural organization of Shirley (183). She views Shirley as a more innovative work than Jane Eyre, since both the narrative, which is split in divided sites, multiple protagonists and shifting relations, as well as the split language and discontinuity of narrative voice reflect Brontë’s challenge of the certainties of social and psychological identity (Shuttleworth 187). Division and uncertainty characterize both the depiction of society and the four main protagonists of the novel (Shuttleworth 187). However, we should not ignore Rogers’ claim that although many critics claim that Brontë seeks to associate rebellion of the suppressed workers with her representation of unfulfilled and dominated women, there is also the option that in fact she sought to dissociate
them; and this is realized in the figure of Mrs Pryor (Rogers 164). Although Mrs Pryor is an abused woman by both her husband and her employer, she outspokenly defends traditional class distinctions and the Establishment, embodying thus conservative, Tory ideology (Rogers 164).

Furthermore, Susan Belasco claims that separate social groups in the novel are foregrounded also on the basis of language, since in Shirley language is a marker of social divisions. Brontë offers a range of different dialects and her comments on language are employed to highlight one of the main themes of Shirley which is society’s inhumanity to the powerless (Belasco 637). Dialect allows Brontë to construct her characters and at the same time to draw attention to the barriers established by society to discriminate against the powerless (Belasco 638). Belasco is particularly interested in bidialectical characters like Hiram Yorke who speaks the “Yorkshire Burr” but can also use an educated middle-class accent. This quality establishes him as a symbol of the possibility of breaking down social barriers between classes (Belasco 638). According to Belasco, bidialectical characters (like Yorke) in Shirley serve a very important function; as language generally indicated social worth in England, by means of their bidialectical maneuvering, these characters are subtle reminders that the social system is not fixed and unchanging (643). Dialect speakers assume a rigid place in the class system whereas the bidialectical characters undermine and subvert this system through their control of language (Belasco 643).71

Therefore, the fusion and the complexity of the co-existence of class and gender issues, which are central concerns in Shirley, are reflected on language and the narrative spectrum; more specifically, on a complex network consisting of constant

71 Also, Morris contends that the narrative voice—bi-dialectal, like that of Hiram Yorke—constitutes the implied writer as undeferential, intent upon speaking out the truth, and mockingly contemptuous of affectation (Morris 307).
shifts and splits in narration as well as a fusion of linguistic dialects and instances of bidialectalism.

3. Shirley’s Schoolroom as a Version of the Camera Obscura

The representation of the mind in Shirley draws on the camera obscura which is both a public and a private space. Within the site of this camera obscura, the spectrum of social, financial, industrial, class and other public issues is revealed and at the same time, Caroline’s private quest of self-education and knowledge emerges. This nexus of public and private issues is seen through the prism of the narrator, and develops in a series of versions of the camera obscura, which refer to mental activity. The schoolroom functions as an introductory version of the camera obscura, which permits the spectrum of the various perspectives and voices to be revealed and it is the site which defines Caroline’s quest of knowledge, (self) education and epistemology.

The schoolroom is a site which is both private and public, and as such it liberates both centripetal and centrifugal discourses, voices and perspectives. It is a site which demands the existence of order and hierarchy but at the same time it involves their questioning, their subversion and the exploration of alternatives. Also, it is a site where power relations develop and at the same time it is a space which, like the camera obscura, is enclosed and where the acquisition of knowledge becomes possible even in indirect, covert ways which involve romance, education and eroticized mentorship as well as the acquisition of knowledge. Thus, the epistemological pursuits on part of the two female heroines are answered in the site of the schoolroom, in the figure of the mentor-lover Louis Moore for Shirley and the governess-mother, Mrs Pryor, for Caroline.
In the schoolroom, the social ambiguity and the nuances of the social position of the educator merge together with epistemological pursuits on part of the female subject. The aspects of this ambiguity are exemplified in different ways in a spectrum of characters like Louis Moore who is a tutor, Mrs Pryor who is a governess, Caroline who works occasionally as a teacher of English for her cousins, and aspires to become herself a governess and Shirley, who together with Caroline works as a Sunday school teacher.

The ambiguity of gender roles is exemplified within the realm of the schoolroom. In *Shirley*, Louis Moore is the governess figure through which the novel disturbs the boundaries of both class and gender (Ingham 50), and underscores the fluidity of gender issues and labels. His feminized identity is confirmed in the language he uses since he claims that, unlike other men, he can read Shirley right through, and uses skillfully women’s language of literature, symbol and fantasy, as Patricia Ingham holds (50). Like Shirley and Caroline, he resorts to romantic narratives of desire, in an attempt to “rewrite” his life in a fantasy of a reversal of his and Shirley’s humiliating class position (Ingham 50-51).

As a tutor, he is admired for qualities which are traditionally attributed to the middle-class mother. For example, he tenderly cares for the crippled boy and he calms, almost ‘mothers’ Shirley from her fears when she is bitten by a rabid dog (Ingham 51), and it is for these qualities that she loves him. Thus, the sharp distinction between ‘essentially’ feminine and masculine characteristics collapses. At the same time, Louis’ change of class through his marriage with Shirley flouts the assumption that it is the woman who takes on the man’s class in marriage and not the other way round (Ingham 51).
Besides, in *Shirley* emerges the socially ambivalent nature of the schoolroom, which functions as an oppressive as well as a liberating vehicle. Elizabeth Gargano refers to critics, for example Gilbert and Gubar, or Elliot Vansikke, who view Moore’s schoolroom as an unqualified site of patriarchy and oppression. She considers such criticism as too naive. She holds that behind Moore’s schoolroom, one can detect the rich educational discourse of its time which leads to images of the schoolroom as a field for contesting social possibilities. Also, she explores Rousseau’s influence on Brontë which is twofold: it leads to the representation of education itself as a critique of power structures and social norms (Gargano 3) as well as the image of the eroticized relationship between tutor and pupil which echoes Rousseau’s novel *Nouvelle Heloise* (1). According to Gargano, it is the space of the private schoolroom and activities like her schoolgirl writing, that allow Shirley to experience freedom from her various public identities (Gargano 4).

In this framework, teaching and tutoring are seen as part of a romantic relationship and the schoolroom becomes the place where knowledge in the broader sense is attained and lessons in real life take place. The schoolroom apart from being a site where various discourses regarding education emerge, becomes also the space where the romantic relationship between Shirley and Mr Louis Moore starts and develops (S 610-625). The same happens with the second couple of the novel, Robert Moore and Caroline. Moore starts reading *Coriolanus*, then Caroline takes over and the scene of reading becomes the setting of their courtship (S 90-93). As Morris holds, Caroline uses Shakespeare’s play to instruct Moore in the necessary qualities of leadership for an English capitalist employer, persuading him to relinquish his imaginative identification with the glamorous but brutal power embodied in Coriolanus (292).
So, in the spectrum of the narrative of *Shirley*, the educational discourse merges with romantic love affairs, and issues of class and gender roles merge with the problematics of power relations. As Patricia Menon argues, it seems that in Brontë’s view, the links between lover and mentor revolve around several kinds of power (103). According to Menon, in Charlotte Brontë’s novels, power may result from the intellectual superiority of the teacher, or his moral supremacy. A third kind of power, even more powerful, draws its strength from control of feeling, which is easier on the side where the feeling is weaker or absent (usually the pupil). And a fourth one is the sexual relationship that results in the mastery of one partner and the submission of the other (Menon 104).\(^2\)

However, power relations in the schoolroom are not always stable or open to a fixed interpretation, as the following example demonstrates, where the same idea is interpreted in different ways by the two characters, Louis and Shirley. In their case, the discussion of romantic relations and flirt in the framework of a schoolroom develops into a discussion of power economy and gender roles within the framework of marriage. The schoolroom and the rapport between the educator and his pupil are viewed as a metaphor of an ideal marriage, since the schoolroom also explores various social and sexual parameters with a strong educational component. As Louis says:

\(^2\) Menon ascertains a differentiation in the use of the mentor-lover motif in *Shirley* as opposed to its use in the rest of Charlotte Brontë’s novels. She contends that Caroline and Robert develop a relationship in which they attempt to educate each other but she wonders whether their mutual mentorship derives more from habit or from genuine interest (110). She also views the relationship between Louis and Shirley as marginal, since it emerges relatively late in the novel and dominates the final pages (Menon 110). And Menon goes on to comment on the fact that when Shirley reveals her feelings for Louis, she repeats to him passages from French, that is, she chooses to reveal her loving feelings by using her lover’s language and not her own (110). So, she holds that the novel’s ending is ambiguous in the sense that it fosters in the reader the uncertainty as to what both Brontë and Shirley see as a desirable outcome in the power struggle of a couple (Menon 112).
“I would like to be first tutor and then husband. I would teach her [his wife] my language, my habits, my principles, and then I would reward her with my love.” (S 616)

This phrase, by employing educational language, expresses centripetal discourse and the patriarchal ideal of a man who wishes to find a “shapeless” woman (in this case Shirley, who is an orphan girl), teach her, change her and adjust her to his habits and principles in order to marry her. Later, however, Shirley gives a different interpretation to the same model of marriage. As Gargano notes, the schoolroom is a fluid site, where Shirley is free but also submissive. Shirley explains:

“My husband is not to be my baby … Improving a husband! No. I shall insist upon my husband improving me, or else we part.” (S 619)

The model of the husband/teacher and the wife/pupil in a marriage, is viewed as something ideal and is endorsed by a strong, independent woman, since Shirley is compared with a “lioness” and a “leopard” (S 618), who sets high standards in her marriage and claims to marry a man that she esteems and respects. Seemingly, she endorses Louis’ superiority, but in fact she sets high expectations for her husband/leader. Her aim is not to plead subordination to male superiority, but to attain her own self-improvement. Behind the words of subordination to her husband lies an educational discourse, that of a woman who is spiritually restless, who is eager to learn and educate herself and does so within the limited sphere of a Victorian middle-class lady. She does not claim money or social status in her marriage but an outlet from spiritual suffocation. Thus, marriage is seen by Brontë as an alternative version of education for a woman. Therefore, two different perspectives of the same ideal are voiced by two characters and the image of marriage as a means of education is constructed through the blending of both perspectives.
This process of maturation and learning forms an educational discourse which underlies the whole novel. In the end, both heroines seem to find their Home and happiness in the figure of an educator. Caroline finds her real mother in the face of Mrs Pryor, Shirley’s former governess, and as a result she recovers from illness and sadness. Similarly, Shirley gets married to her tutor Louis Moore, who proves to be worthy of the powerful and independent figure of Shirley.

Therefore, the schoolroom is a site of multiple functions in the story and of ambivalent nature. It is a space of patriarchal oppression but also of liberation, it contributes to the fostering of education but also to eroticized communication. Thus, it becomes a locus where various and crucial questions emerge regarding not only society and class matters but also the power economy between the two genders, or the role of the two genders both in the social and the domestic domains. Its enclosed space, the whole spectrum of issues and voices which are revealed in its realm, as well as the educational discourse which develops within its walls, make the schoolroom a first textual version of the camera obscura, which is the site of the representation of the mind and the space which makes possible knowledge and self-education for the female subject.

4. INVISIBILITY IN THE SPACE OF THE MIND: CAROLINE’S PURSUITS OF SELF-EDUCATION

In this “prismatic” narrative of Shirley where many voices and perspectives emerge and merge in the discussion of various issues, it is difficult to locate a fine line of progress and mental development in the representation of a single female mind. However, the discourse of the mind and epistemology are among the main underlying
discourses of the construction of femininity in *Shirley*. And this is evident if we focus on Caroline and her discussion of the mind, since it is her mind we mostly have access to. Although the novel is named after Shirley, Shirley, as Sally Shuttleworth explains, appears “silenced and exiled from the conclusion of her own story” but also: absent from the first third of the novel, existing rather as a social and psychological space to be filled. … We are given her speech, but never like Caroline, enter directly into her inner thoughts. We are offered instead a series of other people’s readings of Shirley. (Shuttleworth 188)

On the other hand, Caroline offers us her own reading of the world. The narrator has access into her thoughts and we, as readers, are involved in the gradual stages of her own questioning, of her progress from ignorance and immaturity to the construction of her own identity.

In the beginning, Caroline appears to be the classic Victorian young lady and, as Helen Taylor explains, “Brontë’s only unemployed heroine of no independent means, [who] spends her time sewing for charity and learning appropriate female skills” (90). She lives, and almost dies, for love. However, she is tortured by the knowledge of how futile and dreary the life she is forced to live is (Taylor 90). In her effort to ponder on her own fate and her role in the social environment of her times, Caroline turns inwards and soon demonstrates a firm belief and trust in her mind as a means to acquiring knowledge, constructing her own self-education and establishing her own power.

The representation of the mind in Caroline’s discourse starts from its being a strictly gendered space and gradually becoming a negotiated site where objective and subjective vision merge, fantasy narratives develop and discourses of superstition are embedded. So, the merging of both male and female elements constructs Caroline’s
epistemology. In the end, the female mind emerges as a powerful means of recognition between mother and daughter as well as a means of female self-exploration and education.

In the first volume of the novel, Caroline monopolizes the reader’s interest and the narrator focuses mostly on the thoughts of her own mind. Shirley is almost invisible in the first part of the novel, whereas Caroline unravels her urge for a change in her life, and the questions to which she struggles to find an answer and which initiate the process of her self-education and maturation.

Caroline’s interest in Robert Moore forms the context of her inner quest and self-exploration. Her disappointment about Robert’s lack of interest in her is the cause for her channeling her anger inwards, as Sally Shuttleworth pinpoints (190). In her exploration of her inner psyche and management of her anger, Caroline comments on feminine “wisdom” and the methodology used to accomplish this feminine strength and wisdom is described in the following words:

A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing … Take the matter as you find it; ask no questions; utter no remonstrances: it is your best wisdom. You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don’t shriek because the nerves are martyred: do not doubt that your mental stomach—if you have such a thing—is strong as an ostrich’s—the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind: in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob. For the whole remnant of your life, if you survive the
test—some, it is said, die under it—you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive.

(§ 105, my italics)

In this instance, the mind is represented as another part of the body, the stomach, and thinking is represented as another process of assimilation and digestion. Thus, in intellectual and mental terms, the impossible can happen; a stone can be digested. This shows Caroline’s belief in the power of the mind—in the sense that it can achieve seemingly impossible things—and at the same time exemplifies her profound trust in the mind’s training and education so as to achieve “impossible” goals and overcome problems in life. The desirable end in such a process is the learning of “the great lesson,” that is, the education of the mind and the self, and the result of such a painful trial is change, growing up, maturity or, in the novel’s words, becoming “stronger, wiser, less sensitive.”

So, the mind can be a woman’s means to an important educational and epistemological end, and Caroline poses serious questions which lay the foundation for and trigger off her journey to knowledge and maturity. The first questions that she poses to herself refer to an attempt to define a feminine scope in life:

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73 The ‘mental stomach’ and the bread and stone images in this passage, link the psychological deprivation of Caroline and the physical starvation of the workers, indicting equally the class and gender norms which dictate that they should suffer in silence (Shuttleworth 196). Shuttleworth holds that there is a broader connection between “bread and starvation” which connects and links Caroline’s and the workers’ problems (192). This is one of the intricate mechanisms in Shirley which shows that “psychological and social life are interwoven” (Shuttleworth 183). In addition, Sally Shuttleworth holds that the parallel between Caroline and the workers is defined in the following way: the workers express their resistance through acts of violence directed towards their own simulacrum, the machine; Caroline similarly embarks on a course of resistance aimed at what she sees as her own simulacrum and this is her body (203). Her physiological decline suggests a form of self-hatred focused on a desire to separate mind from body and to place herself outside the sexual marketplace which commodifies the body (Shuttleworth 203). However, Shuttleworth reckons that there is an important difference in the aforementioned parallelism between Caroline and the workers: unlike the workers who define and recognize objective and external causes of their suffering, Caroline assumes a personal sense of guilt, and locates the origins of her own unhappiness firmly within her own psyche (Shuttleworth 204). Caroline turns inwards, to her own psyche, in order to find the truth and the answers to the questions that tantalize her. Although she appears silent and subdued (like the workers), in fact she is involved in self-exploring quest which is fueled by her ‘starvation’ for a scope and interest in life.
“How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between me and the grave?” (S 173)

This is the basic question which the novel attempts to answer regarding Caroline and which reveals the first seeds of her spiritual and intellectual awakening, in a soliloquy which reveals centripetal, patriarchal ideology and expectations of a woman. Thus, opposing, undermining and centrifugal discourse is voiced by a seemingly traditional, silent Victorian young woman such as Caroline:

“[I thought] I was growing up to the ordinary destiny, and never troubled myself to seek any other; … I may have been mistaken. … I shall never marry. What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?” (S 174)

This questioning of the feminine roles and expectations that she formerly had taken for granted, constitutes the foundation on which she attempts to explore and construct new models of femininity. Although she appears to be a silent, timid, quiet Victorian young woman, her mind is restless enough to pose questions, voice centrifugal discourse and seek ways to undermine patriarchal expectations of self-abnegation on the part of women with the occasion of her visit to two “old maids”:

That is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve: other people solve it for them by saying, ‘Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted.’ … Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. Undue humility makes tyranny; weak concession creates selfishness. … Each human being has its share of rights. (S 174, my italics)
And Caroline goes on to add: “Queer thoughts these that surge in my mind; are they right thoughts? I don’t know” (S 174). This lack of knowledge constitutes the gap that she is drawn to fill in, and in these words the representation of the mind is beginning to allude to an enclosed space where ideas and thoughts are represented textually as objects that surge to enter the mind, recalling thus the camera obscura. Her mind becomes the enclosed mental space, the locus where spiritual and intellectual action takes place, where thoughts and ideas surge to enter. So, the image of the mind as a camera obscura reflects the confinement, enclosure and loneliness of an inquiring female subject.

This confinement of femininity is further embodied textually in the figures of the old maids, Miss Mann and Miss Ainley who educate Caroline on the option of being an “old maid” herself and provide her with the opportunity to consider whether such an option would be justifiable in her case.74 The figures of Miss Mann and Miss Ainley, who offer two contrasting faces of spinsterhood, sour and sweet (Shuttleworth 201), appear as part of the spectrum of characters in the novel that appear in order to educate Caroline, to make her question and think on issues of gender roles. And as Shuttleworth explains, with the occasion of the old maids, Caroline resorts to a cultural and economic analysis of the position of women: the stagnant system which offers women no form of profitable occupation makes them “decline in health: they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness” (S 391; Shuttleworth 201).

So, the option of spinsterhood is not considered satisfactory for Caroline, who does not obtain her peace of mind after the precepts of the old maids. In a narrative

74 A large number of middle-class unmarried women were believed to be ‘surplus’ population. So the figure of the spinster or ‘old maid’ received repeated attention in popular literature, periodicals, or scientific texts (Shuttleworth 194). In addition, Caroline articulates the double-bind that women were placed in: women were given social value only if they succeeded in the marriage market, but were considered worthless if they were seen to be trying to scheme towards that end (Shuttleworth 195).
that focuses mainly on Caroline’s response, thoughts and conclusions that derived from her meeting with the two old maids, Caroline as a watcher observes these old maids who perform an educatory function and teach her their aspect of reality. In her narrative, in which she does not include a quotation of their words but only her response and thoughts, it becomes clear that she was taught how to adopt a penetrating vision, and in her turn she teaches the reader the same thing. The disparity between appearance and reality, illusion and truth, is a recurrent issue in Brontë’s fiction and resurfaces in the event of the “old maids.” Caroline explains that behind the ugly appearance of the two old ladies, there was respectability and sincerity. Behind Miss Mann’s “goblin-grimness,” there was a “sincere, conscientious” (S 179) woman who had been “a most devoted daughter and sister, an unwearied watcher by lingering deathbeds” (S 180). And although Miss Ainley was a “very ugly” lady whom “lively young gentlemen, and inconsiderate old ones, … declared her hideous” (S 181), in fact she was an unselfish, religious, respectable, “serene, humble, kind and equable” (S 182) woman, who expected no reward for her generosity.

However, Caroline is still obsessed with Robert—a romance which signifies not simply her desire for love, but a deeper and more profound urge to know herself and the world, and mostly her attempt to cancel the prospect of herself as an old maid. Her desire for Robert and matrimony is her answer to the barren future of spinsterhood. She:

wasted, grew more joyless … and an inward funeral cry haunted and harassed her: the heaviness of a broken spirit, and of pining and palsyng faculties, settled slow on her buoyant youth. Winter seemed conquering her spring: the mind’s soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation. (S 184, my italics)
This “barren stagnation” is what she wants to extricate herself from, although she seems declining, self-consuming and perplexed as to which road to take in order to find her way out. Her mind appears as soil which needs to be cultivated and educated. And at this point, she is deprived of her mind which is the most important tool for her (self) education. This “inward funeral cry” that Caroline experiences is an intuitive, almost metaphysical experience, which brings to surface the same epiphany that takes place in *Jane Eyre*. It reminds us of the telepathic cry in *Jane Eyre*, a cry which does not originate in an outward source but echoes inside the camera obscura of Jane’s and now Caroline’s mind. This cry is the textual sign that encapsulates the friction between the external expectations of women as they are set by society and Caroline’s questioning of them, after filtering them, which alerts her and urges her to explore alternatives. Although the “funeral” quality of Caroline’s cry and the image of winter in her mind’s soil establish a grim setting, this cry is the first seed of an illuminating process of self-education and self-development which will take place in the course of the novel.

5. THE QUEST FOR FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY: FANTASY IN THE SPACE OF THE MIND

In the second volume of the novel, the questions that have tantalized Caroline in the previous part take a more specific form, the narrative of her thoughts and conversations with others becomes more private and personal, showing in a clearer way the profundness of her thinking and emotions. In addition, the frustration of her potential and her course towards mental collapse become more evident. The narrator has access to Caroline’s inner thoughts and we, as readers, have the opportunity to listen to the voice of a seemingly compromised and silenced young woman. The
references to her mind are clearer in the second volume, whereas the presence and image of Shirley becomes gradually more precise and imposing, offering either a contrast or a complement to Caroline’s image.

*Caroline’s Instinctual Knowledge and “The Voice We Hear in Solitude”* After filtering the reality around her and the expectations of women from society, Caroline embarks on a self-exploring quest, where she voices her desire for a change in her life and her wish to become a governess. She addresses her uncle, who is also her guardian, since she is parentless, but her wish is rejected by him who will not accept such an option. This happens in a confrontation which is rather revealing of patriarchal ideology and the prejudice and stereotypes that accompany gender roles. Thus, the uncle becomes the vehicle of centripetal discourse that perpetuates the established social order and Caroline’s centrifugal discourse and her desire for some sort of change and independence is eventually silenced:

> “Have you any objection, uncle, to my inquiring for a situation in a family?”

Her uncle, ignorant as the table supporting his coffee-cup of all his niece had undergone and was undergoing, scarcely believed his ears.

> “What whim now?” he asked. “Are you bewitched? What can you mean?”
> “I am not well, and need a change,” she said. …
> “What on earth is the matter with you?” he asked. “What is wrong? How are you ailing?”

No answer, only the brown eyes filled, the faintly-tinted lips trembled.

> “Look out for a situation, indeed! For what situation are you fit? What have you been doing with yourself? You are not well.”

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75 To look for a situation in a family: to become a governess.
“I should be well if I went from home.”

“These women are incomprehensible. They have the strangest knack of startling you with unpleasant surprises. To-day you see them bouncing, buxom, red as cherries, and round as apples; to-morrow they exhibit themselves effete as dead weeds, blanced and broken down. And the reason for it all? That’s the puzzle. She has her meals, her liberty, a good house to live in, and good clothes to wear as usual: ... Provoking! Then comes the question, what is to be done. I suppose I must send for advice. Will you have a doctor, child?”

“No, uncle; I don’t want one: a doctor could do me no good. I merely want change of air and scene.”

“Well, if that be a caprice it shall be gratified. You shall go to a watering-place. I don’t mind the expense; Fanny shall accompany you.”

“But, uncle, some day I must do something for myself: I have no fortune. I had better begin now.”

“While I live, you shall not turn out as a governess, Caroline. I will not have it said that my niece is a governess.” …

“No, uncle; but I long for a change.”

He laughed. “There speaks the woman!” cried he, “the very woman! A change! a change! Always fantastical and whimsical! Well, it’s in her sex.”

“But it is not fantasy and whim, uncle.”

“What is it then?”

“Necessity, I think. I feel weaker than formerly. I believe I should have more to do.” …

“The fact is that you don’t know precisely what you want.”
“Only to be a governess.”

“Pooh! Mere nonsense! I’ll not hear of governessing. Don’t mention it again. It’s rather too feminine a fancy. I have finished breakfast, ring the bell: put all crotchets out of your head and run away and amuse yourself.” (S 190-191).

Caroline’s desire to change her life and rely on her own means as a governess is viewed by her uncle as a “provoking” “whim,” “caprice” and “nonsense.” It is revealing that this whim is associated with her “sex,” is seen as an inherent trait of femininity and is despised by her uncle as such, in a discourse which is particularly revealing of patriarchal ideology which dictated that a woman be satisfied and thankful if she had “her meals, her liberty, a good house to live in, and good clothes to wear as usual” (S 189-190). To these expectations, Caroline articulates a centripetal discourse which questions this establishment, and looks for alternative models of womanhood in the first acceptable option for a respectable lady who had “no fortune” (S 190), that is, in the work as a governess.

However, Caroline’s aspirations at this point are stifled by her uncle, and she resorts to a reaction which is expected by her, that is silence and invisibility. She avoids the company and the small talk of the “commonplace young ladies” (S 192) of the neighbourhood and:

All this Caroline knew, partly by instinct, partly by observation: she regulated her conduct by her knowledge, keeping her pale face and wasted figure as much out of sight as she could. Living thus in complete seclusion, she ceased to receive intelligence of the little transactions of the neighbourhood. (S 192, my italics)

Thus Caroline reveals her epistemological tools with the help of which she constructs her knowledge in a broader sense, that is knowledge of the world and life. And these
tools are, on the one hand, observation—the masculine trait which characterizes the detached look of the male experimenter—and, on the other hand, a traditionally feminine way of knowing, that is, instinct.

It is instinct as an epistemological tool that she resorts to, also in connection with traditionally academic knowledge, like literary knowledge. In a conversation with Shirley, Caroline refers to Cowper and Rousseau, and projects them in her words as tragic figures, who loved passionately but their love was never returned (S 227-228), drawing thus a parallel with herself, who suffered from the frustration of her feelings for Robert Moore:

“And what I say of Cowper, I should say of Rousseau. Was Rousseau ever loved? He loved passionately; but was his passion ever returned? I am certain, never. And if there were any female Cowpers and Rousseaus, I should assert the same of them.”

“Who told you this, I ask? Did Moore?”

“Why should anybody have told me? Have I not an instinct? Can I not divine by analogy? Moore never talked to me either about Cowper, or Rousseau, or love. The voice we hear in solitude told me all I know on these subjects.” (S 228, my italics)

Therefore, man as the only source of knowledge is cancelled in Caroline’s words, and what emerges is an alternative, feminine source of knowledge regarding the reception of literature is, “instinct” or what Caroline describes in other words as the “voice we hear in solitude.” Therefore, she turns inwards to educate herself and places the epistemological tools that condition her understanding (in this case of poetry and literature) in her inner self. Alternative epistemologies that derive from instinct arise
and shape the knowledge and understanding of the main female subject, Caroline, whose quest for self-knowledge and self-education we trace in the novel.

*The Female Mind: a Dark Enclosed Space.* Caroline is trying to overcome her love disappointment and establish her emotional balance, when she thinks that Robert is in love with Shirley. Her reaction is in fact a reflection of her mind as a camera obscura, a dark, “hiding place”:

[Robert] is at this instant looking down on a fine face [Shirley’s face]; and he must think it with a man’s brain, not with mine. [Shirley] has such generous, yet soft fire in her eyes. She smiles—what makes her smile so sweet? I saw that Robert felt its beauty, and must have felt it with his man’s heart, not with my dim woman’s perception. They look to me like two great, happy spirits … And what am I—standing here in shadow, shrinking into concealment, my mind darker than my hiding-place? I am one of this world, no spirit—a poor, doomed mortal, who asks, in ignorance and hopelessness, wherefore she was born, to what end she lives; whose mind forever runs on the question, how she shall at last encounter, and by whom be sustained through death? (§ 234-235, my italics)

Caroline’s frustration is not based on jealousy only, but has deeper roots in more fundamental questions. She returns to what really interests her; she exposes her “ignorance and hopelessness” in her attempt to answer the self-exploring question of the purpose of her life. And her attempt to answer this question leads her to references to the mind.

However, this first assumption of clearly distinct male and female minds, that is, the reference to a gendered mind, does not seem an accurate and satisfactory
representation of the mind to Caroline, thus she goes on to discuss the matter further; she focuses on and experiments with a more acute representation of her own mind. Approaching it simply as a negation or as the opposite of the male mind seems not enough and thus she attempts to define it more accurately. So, at this point, the most appropriate representation of a female mind seems to be that of a camera obscura. The enclosed space of the mind, viewed as a dark space where female conscience, hidden in the dark, asks in ignorance, is a model of representation which seems to accommodate a female type of knowing, what Caroline terms as “my dim woman’s perceptions.” Caroline, the female subject, occupies the shadow in the dark chamber of the camera obscura, embodying the detached viewer in the camera obscura which defines an objective type of vision, as Crary holds (40).

But this objective vision inside the Camera Obscura is not the masculine, objective vision of the male scientist who views the natural phenomena in a detached way. Instead, Caroline’s discussion of the female mind places in perspective, develops and explores the element of superstition (as seen in Jane Eyre as well), a traditionally feminine element of perception. The binary opposition of male/female, reason/superstition is questioned again:

“You get somewhat thin my love, and somewhat pale. Do you sleep well? Your eyes have a languid look,” and she [Mrs Pryor] gazed at her [Caroline] anxiously. “I sometimes dream melancholy dreams,” answered Caroline; “and if I lie awake for an hour or two in the night, I am continually thinking of the Rectory as a dreary old place. You know it is very near the churchyard: the back part of the house is extremely ancient, and it is said that the out-kitchens there were once enclosed in the churchyard, and that there are graves under them. I rather long to leave the Rectory.”
“My dear! You are surely not superstitious?”

“No, Mrs Pryor; but I think I grow what is called nervous. I see things under a darker aspect than I used to do. I have fears I never used to have—not of ghosts, but of omens and disastrous events; and I have an inexpressible weight on my mind which I would give the world to shake off, and I cannot do it.”

“Strange!” cried Shirley. “I never feel so.” Mrs Pryor said nothing.

“Fine weather, pleasant days, pleasant scenes are powerless to give me pleasure,” continued Caroline. “Calm evenings are not calm to me: moonlight, which I used to think mild, now only looks mournful. Is this weakness of mind, Mrs Pryor, or what is it? I cannot help it: I often struggle against it: I reason; but reason and effort make no difference.” (S 240-241, my italics)

Caroline explores her almost devastating feelings of melancholy and the disappointment that she suffers from, in relation to the way she views the world and her state of mind. She places the source of unhappiness in a private context, inside her own self and as a matter of her own perception and perspective. So, subjective vision emerges as the main means of perception, recognizing prisms through which we can perceive realities around us: “I see things under a darker aspect than I used to do” (S 240). This change signifies her maturation, a process which is yet incomplete and still in progress, as evidenced by the female subject’s aphonia, that is Caroline’s inability to define and articulate “the inexpressible weight on [her] mind” (S 241). This experience leads Caroline to doubt and question her own mental state: “is this weakness of mind?” and she struggles against such a weakness by reasoning. This way, Caroline explores and discusses structures of mental representation, starting from a gendered bipole:

Male vs Female
Reason vs Superstition

Strength vs Weakness

Such binary oppositions are cancelled, though, since they seem inaccurate, and this is why the whole structure is undermined and rejected by Shirley’s statement: “Strange! … I never feel so.” (241). So, this is not a universal bipole valid for every woman, although both Caroline and Mrs Pryor (Mrs Pryor with her silence affirms that she has shared the experience of an “inexpressible weight in her mind”) seem to recognize themselves and their frames of mind reflected in it. This reveals the heterogeneity within the body of women regarding perception.

Women’s Experiments in Life. Caroline’s attempt to invest with words the inexpressible weight of her mind and to find an outlet from this stagnation is voiced textually in her wish to become a governess: “I wish to be a governess” (S 241). An option that is immediately silenced not only by overt patriarchal oppression by her uncle as seen before, but also by other female voices—that of Mrs Pryor and Shirley Keeldar:

[Caroline said]: “Mrs Pryor, I should like to go from home, but not on any purposeless excursion or visit. I wish to be a governess as you have been. It would oblige me greatly if you would speak to my uncle on the subject.”

“Nonsense!” broke in Shirley. “What an idea! Be a governess! Better be a slave at once. Where is the necessity of it? Why should you dream of such a painful step?”

“My dear,” said Mrs Pryor,” you are very young to be a governess, and not sufficiently robust: the duties a governess undertake are often severe.”

“And I believe I want severe duties to occupy me.”
“Occupy you!” cried Shirley. “When are you idle? I never saw a more industrious girl than you. You are always at work. … Would it make you strong and happy to go and live as a dependant amongst utter strangers? It would not; and the experiment must not be tried. I tell you it would fail; it is not in your nature to bear the desolate life governesses generally lead: you would fall ill: I won’t hear of it.”

And, Miss Keeldar paused, having uttered this prohibition very decidedly. Soon, she recommenced, still looking somewhat “courroucee”:

“Why, it is my daily pleasure now to look out for the little cottage bonnet and the silk scarf glancing through the trees in the lane, and to know that my quiet, shrewd, thoughtful companion and monitress is coming back to me: that I shall have her sitting in the room to look at, to talk to, or to let alone, as she and I please. This may be a selfish sort of language—I know it is; but it is this language which naturally rises to my lips; therefore I utter it … Drink some tea, Caroline: eat something—you eat nothing; laugh and be cheerful, and stay at home.”

Miss Helstone shook her head and sighed. She felt what difficulty she would have to persuade any one to assist or sanction her in making that change in her life that she believed desirable. (§ 241-242)

So, the agents who suppress Caroline’s dreams, her aspirations to lead her own way in life and develop her own potential are the two women who are closer to her—Mrs Pryor and, most importantly, Shirley. Shirley, in a particularly paternalistic discourse, abruptly and “decidedly” opposes Caroline’s “experiment” in life—reminding her that experiments are not to be performed by women—depreciating almost insultingly Caroline’s inner thoughts, plans and ambitions as “nonsense”.
Thus, Shirley/Captain Keeldar oscillates between a model of independent femininity and strength on the one hand, and on the other hand she seems to embrace the patriarchal ideology that she initially seemed to undermine.\textsuperscript{76} It is Shirley who utters centripetal discourse and stifles Caroline’s ‘revolution,’ who draws her back and reminds her that her ‘natural’ position is back at home, being her “thoughtful companion,” a “quiet” “monitress,” passively attending and admiring Shirley’s social demonstrations. Her discourse places Caroline in the context of her companionship at the same location where Caroline’s uncle had placed her earlier in the novel: a doll-like (or automaton-like) plaything, an object “to look at, to talk to, to let alone,” whose only duty is to eat, “laugh and be cheerful, and stay at home” (S 242). And Shirley drives the conversation to an end with a question, eager to ensure that Caroline’s mental condition has been restored back to its expected quietness: “Now, is your mind quieted?” (S 243). So, Caroline withdraws from the combat, quiet and weakened and represses her revolution by deferring it: “I think in time they (my friends) will be obliged to think as I do” (S 243). And her mind and mental condition is restored back to silence.

\textit{Female Fantasy Seen and Narrated Inside the Camera Obscura.} But what happens in Caroline’s life immediately after the silencing of her desire? Shirley continues voicing patriarchal discourse; she trades Caroline’s acquiescence, friendship and

\textsuperscript{76} Morris contends that Shirley’s independent and high-spirited nature contributes to the construction of the male heroes of the novel. It is her assertive challenge to male authority that allows the novel’s heroes—Helstone, Robert and Louis Moore—to demonstrate their power to command and subdue (Morris 303). Thus, the trick behind this choice on part of Charlotte Brontë is that by diminishing Shirley’s heroic qualities, she elevates her future husband, Louis Moore (Morris 303). On the whole, Morris holds that in \textit{Shirley}, women are unable to identify socially or politically with positions of power and almost “invest in martyrdom” (305). And, while men are invigorated by ideals such as heroic conflict, conquest, and striving, women appear submissive to processes of humbling and crushing that constitute their path to adulthood, processes which lead to their “enervation and decline” (Morris 305).
adherence/submission to her with the proposal of a journey to the countryside financed by Shirley’s money—thus, Shirley totally conforms to patriarchal, masculine ideology and Caroline is tempted to do so. So, the oppression of reality is soothed by the consolation of escapism. However, such a journey does not really take place. In fact the text resorts to a mere “fanciful” conversation about such a journey between the two women. Their journey to the “North Atlantic” (S 244) is transferred to a mental locus and transforms into an imaginary journey which is financed not by money, a commodity in a patriarchal society, but by fantasy and imagination, an alternative feminine topos where the figure of a mermaid emerges. In this way, the oppressive and gloomy reality of the “inexpressible weight” in Caroline’s mind because of the blockage of her aspirations to change her life and become a governess and the images of the “remnants of shrouds, and fragments of coffins, and human bones and mould” (S 245) of the graves under the Rectory back-kitchen that illustrate her depression, is counterbalanced by a narrative of imagination which points to an alternative reality:

“I suppose you expect to see mermaids, Shirley?”

“One of them, at any rate: I do not bargain for less: and she is to appear in some such fashion as this. I am to be walking by myself on deck, rather late of an August evening, watching and being watched by a full harvest-moon. Something is to rise white on the surface of the sea, over which that moon mounts silent, and hangs glorious: the object glitters and sinks. It rises again. I think I hear it cry with an articulate voice: I call you up from the cabin: I show you an image, fair as alabaster, emerging from the dim wave. We both see the long hair, the lifted and foam-white arm, the oval mirror brilliant as a star. It glides nearer: a human face is plainly visible; a face in the style of yours,
whose straight, pure (excuse the word, it is appropriate)—whose straight, pure lineaments, paleness does not disfigure. It looks at us, but not with your eyes. I see a preternatural lure in its wily glance: it beckons. Were we men, we should spring at the sign, the cold billow would be dared for the sake of the colder enchantress; being women, we stand safe, though not dreadless. She comprehends our unmoved gaze; she feels herself powerless; anger crosses her front; she cannot charm, but she will appal us: she rises high, and glides all revealed, on the dark wave-ridge. Temptress-terror! monstrous likeness of ourselves! Are you not glad, Caroline, when at last, and with a wild shriek, she dives?”

“But, Shirley, she is not like us: we are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters.”

“Some of our kind, it is said, are all three. There are men who ascribe to ‘woman,’ in general, such attributes.”

“My dears,” here interrupted Mrs. Pryor, “does it not strike you that your conversation for the last ten minutes has been rather fanciful?”

“But there is no harm in our fancies: is there, ma’am?”

“We are aware that mermaids do not exist: why speak of them as if they did? How can you find interest in speaking of an non-entity?”

“I don’t know,” said Shirley.

“My dear, I think there is an arrival. I heard a step in the lane, while you were talking” … (S 245-246)

In this embedded narrative, the figure of the mermaid with “a preternatural lure in its wily glance” (S 246) tempts both women. Both Shirley and Caroline are invested with the mantel of the woman-non/temptress and non/monster and they stand armoured
against the mermaid’s threat. Caroline declares resolutely her refusal to identify with
the mermaid: “But, Shirley, she is not like us: we are neither temptresses, nor terrors,
nor monsters” (S 246). This mermaid, a “temptress-terror,” is a monster embodying
the model of femininity seen in the eyes of many men, but with whom Shirley and
Caroline do not identify themselves. The mermaid is seen as the “shameless woman”
who enchants men by means of her sexual power (Moore 480). And Shirley, by using
the mermaid’s image which bears a striking “likeness” to Caroline constructs a
narrative, the purpose of which is twofold: first it aims to instruct Caroline about the
male, patriarchal assumptions that associate female desire with the image of the
monster and she introduces Caroline to this patriarchal definition of womanhood as a
siren with the phrase “Some of our kind, it is said, are all three [temptresses, terrors,
and monsters]” (Moore 479, 480). Secondly, Shirley through her actions later in the
novel shows that she has internalized a fear that she might behave like a “woman-
mermaid” herself, when she expresses her rage when her conduct is considered as an
effort to secure a husband, as a “ploy of a mermaid” (Moore 480, 481). So, Shirley
teaches Caroline another lesson in female subjugation (Moore 484). Thus, although
Shirley adopts a seemingly uncompromising female persona as an heiress who deals
with business transactions, and adds Esq. to her name, in many cases, she voices
centripetal discourse.

As soon as Caroline’s threatening wishes for self-assertion vanish, the
mermaid vanishes with them; she “dives” back to nonexistence (“she is a non-entity”)
as Caroline triumphs over the stifling of her inner desires and expectations, deferring
thus an actual, real revolution. What is the function, though, of this embedded
narrative of the woman-mermaid? As Moore claims, in Shirley the “policy” of the
powerless characters, women and working class men, is to use fantasy narratives in
order to “divert their energies into unreal myths as they explore their fantasies” (477). Shirley and Caroline deal with the powerlessness and the limited sphere of the typical middle-class Victorian woman by constructing fantasy narratives of female potential that explore these limits (Moore 478). Also, Shuttleworth claims that Brontë offers radical visions of female potentiality only to expose their illusory nature (213). Therefore, the mind, the enclosed dark room, becomes the site where fantasy narratives develop and function firstly as fantasy experiments with potential alternative identities of womanhood, secondly as narratives of education which instruct, either by reinforcing or questioning established preconceptions of womanhood, and thirdly as a safety valve to threatening dreams of female emancipation.

The Camera Obscura and the ‘Loophole’ of Female Vision. However, Caroline soon retreats to the gendered discussion of the mind and mental activity. Mind and vision are not strictly separated; they are often discussed together and in close interconnection, reminding us of Walker’s reading of the Lockean camera obscura, which recognizes the mind as both the site and the agent of mental activity. Visual epistemology is very often evoked in the discussion of the mind, as in the following case:

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77 According to Moore, powerless characters create mythical narratives in which they are able to exert authority in both narration and decision. However uncompromising Shirley appears, in fact she chooses to resort to paternalistic and autocratic instruction. On the other hand, Caroline creates more realistic scenes of power in the fantasies of the female community that she constructs, which defy convention and “demonstrate the ability of the independent, individual imagination” (Moore 490).

78 The most passionate declarations are the passages on the mermaid and the mythology of Eve (Vanskike 485). These two passages which are perhaps the most overt feminist statements in the novel, are juxtaposed with the scenes where Shirley submits to Louis, which is almost anti-feminist (Vanskike 485). Vanskike claims that the antipodal relationship between Shirley’s earlier feminist stance and her eventual self-subjection renders the scenes of her surrender to Louis absurd (486).
Men rarely like such of their fellows as read their inward nature too clearly and truly. It is good for women, especially, to be endowed with a soft blindness: to have mild, dim eyes, that never penetrate below the surface of things—that take all for what it seems: thousands, knowing this, keep their eyelids drooped on system; but the most downcast glance has its loophole, through which it can, on occasion, take its sentinel survey of life. (S 273, my italics)

So, Caroline’s type of vision is not the masculine, scientific, penetrating vision. Instead it appears to be a reflective kind of vision, it reflects back on the surface of things. It does not penetrate the surface, it does not experiment and study, it does not reach the depth and core of the realities around the female subject. Yet, this first assumption is revised immediately afterwards. The aperture of the camera obscura of the female mind transforms polemically into a “loophole,” through which the female mental agent inside the mental space can “take a survey of life,” and penetrate the surface of things. As Sally Shuttleworth explains, women can have no gaze, they are permitted only a covert glance (211). However, with the reference to the ‘loophole,’ the passage foregrounds the systematic duplicity on the part of women who, in order to survive, must manipulate their surface appearance so as “to suggest that they are mere reflectors of male meanings” (Shuttleworth 211). The use of the word “loophole” suggests imprisonment, as well as warfare where women are in an empowered position to look out on their enemies who are exposed whereas they are safe and concealed in their enclosed tower (Shuttleworth 211). So, this enclosed mental space transforms into a camera obscura, where refractive and not reflective vision can be exerted, a type of vision which can study and take a “survey of life”.

The choice of the imagery of the loophole and its polemical connotations introduces a
“sentinel,” revolutionary potential in the female way of seeing, and makes possible a second perspective of reality from a point of view which can lead to undermining, centrifugal perception. This way, the strict distinction between gendered minds and glances collapses, and feminine and masculine depictions of the mind and modes of perception merge. The experiment of merging feminine vision and mental construction with masculine, objective and penetrating vision does not lead to a negation of feminine fantasy discourse. On the contrary, the subjective vision of the female mind’s eye gives birth to another fantasy narrative, that of the Woman-Titan, which voices the inner pursuits of female identity and becomes part of the educational discourse of the novel.

The Woman-Titan in the Female Camera Obscura. As it is clear by now, many of the embedded texts in Shirley are fantasy stories. One of the basic functions of such stories, as Kate Lawson argues is to voice female “dissent.” Female dissent in Shirley is not embodied in a figure, as it is in Jane Eyre, with Bertha Mason (Lawson 730). The voice of female dissent is not articulated in the words of a character or through logical argumentation but rather in “fantastic stories and narrative musings, in an accumulation of disquieting detail, and in an accretion of images” (Lawson 730). Such examples are the story of the “First Blue-stockin’ or Shirley’s “vision of Eve.” Lawson attributes to these stories a “strained and heightened language” which breaks the otherwise calm surface of the narrative (Lawson 730). I agree that such stories are a covert way of expressing female dissent, they express things that Brontë could not probably voice otherwise and they are experiments that reflect “psychological realism.” But, as we have already seen, Shirley as a character in many occasions does the same in an outspoken way, although in the end she resorts to more compromised
ways of life. However, these stories seem to be explorations of alternative perceptions of the female and the feminine, and I would like to argue that they explore epistemological issues from a female point of view.

Shirley’s subjective vision is employed in order to construct her fantasy narrative on Nature and on the woman Titan. And this narrative triggers off Caroline’s personal response:

“…Nature is now at her evening prayers: she is kneeling before those red hills. I see her prostrate on the great steps of her altar, praying for a fair night for mariners at sea, for travelers in deserts, for lambs on moors, and unfledged birds in woods. Caroline I see her! And I will tell you what she is like: she is like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth.”

“And that is not Milton’s Eve, Shirley.”

“Milton’s Eve! Milton’s Eve! I repeat. No, by the pure Mother of God, she is not! … Milton was great; but was he good? His brain was right; but was his heart? … Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not.” (S 319-320)

The eyes of a man, in this passage, and the masculine penetrating vision of a man do not offer him access to a precise and valid appreciation and perception of the female. Both his brain and his vision are rejected in the text as inadequate, in the attempt to approach femininity—the first woman was not seen. In its stead, a feminine discourse emerges, articulated by Shirley, which approaches primordial images of the Woman—the first woman, Eve, a woman-Titan. In this narrative, subjective vision emerges as the primary means of perception, framing Shirley’s fantasy narrative: “I saw—I now see—a woman Titan” (S 321). In Shirley’s narrative the images of Eve, the woman-Titan, and Nature merge in one figure, that of the Mother and Shirley in
her fantasy assumes the place of the daughter with pleasure, “sinking into a trance” (S 321).

Although this narrative started from Shirley, it triggers off Caroline’s reaction to the narration of “Shirley’s visions”—it reignites her quest for a home and her mother. Shirley’s narrative exemplifies the range of subjective vision and the variability of personal interpretations: “a noise from the road roused Caroline from her filial hopes and Shirley from her Titan visions” (S 322). This comment sheds light on the characters of these two women; Caroline reads in Shirley’s story her need for love, home, protection and, as Morris claims, Shirley’s use of the word “mother” in this context arouses Caroline’s desire for the quest of her own mother (304), whereas Shirley herself focuses on the Titan vision which is associated with power and strength. In her story, Shirley refers to imagination as an alternative to what reality does not offer: “I’ll borrow of imagination what reality will not give me” (S 302).

So, Brontë’s writing of fantasy and the embedded narrative of fantasy are parts of her experimentation on a feminine writing, an exploration of alternative ways to channel her thoughts and feelings. As I would like to show, Shirley’s essay is a fantasy tale which explores the connection between genius and female mind power.

Genius and the Female Mind. Another aspect of the exploration of the mind and mental power as well as the gender of the mind is reflected in Shirley’s embedded narrative “La Premiere Femme Savante.” As I have already mentioned in my Introduction, Richard Yeo explores the concept of genius in images of scientists in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries and mostly Newton. He claims that towards

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79 In writing Shirley, Brontë sought to escape from the “crushing” reality of the deaths of her brother and sisters, and the enervating depression that threatened to engulf her, by turning to energizing intellectual and imaginative activity (Morris 306).
the end of the eighteenth century Newton was esteemed as the archetypal scientist combining genius and morality. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, this idea about Newton changed and people began to see his genius as something more human, associated with an exceptional personality rather than moral virtue as previously thought. Therefore, there was a broader shift from the idea of genius as a divine gift bestowed to individuals, to that of a genius as constituted by an exceptional personality (Yeo 279).

So, how does this shift in the idea of genius, which is closely associated with Newton, relate to the romantic conception of Genius as manifested in Shirley’s essay? Gisele Argyle claims that Charlotte Brontë functions as a reporter of a “fantastical tale of the marriage of woman and genius” in Shirley’s French composition entitled “La Premiere Femme Savante” (750). In this embedded short story, the Genius is depicted as a divine voice that “passed between Heaven and Earth…and descending, reached Earth” (S 488). The “bridal-hour of Genius and Humanity” (S 489) that followed, depicts in the clearest way the new (early nineteenth-century) rising concept of Genius as closely tied/married to Human nature. Human nature (Humanity) appears to be “refined” by means of personality qualities attributed to Genius, like “patience…strength…and unutterable excellence [that] he held from God – his Origin” (S 490). Moreover, it is striking that in this story Genius appears to relate (by means of marriage and salvation) to the Female, something which is contrasting the dominant archetypal figure of the Genius as Male, thus constructing centrifugal discourse.

Commenting on this short story of “The First Blue-Stocking” Elizabeth Gargano explores issues of education. More specifically, she interprets this “primitive” marriage between “nature” and “the savage” in this short story as an instance of Rousseau’s influence on Brontë, associating it with the eighteenth-century
educational tradition of the “method of nature” rooted in the writings of both Rousseau and Pestalozzi (Gargano 4). So, this embedded narrative is another argument that empowers the female mind and its mental ability and underscores the discourse for the education of women. This story is a voice from the realm of fantasy which anticipates and implicitly and subtly reinforces the ideas that Caroline utters a little later in her appeal to the ‘Men of England’ and her attempt to remind them of their responsibility towards women’s education.

*Caroline’s Manifesto.* Caroline’s quest for a home, for a mother, for self-education, knowledge and identity is part of a discourse which clashes with the patriarchal neglect and underestimation of women’s mental potential and capacity. Argumentation to support this discourse is articulated by Caroline, in her quest for her own identity, her self education and her emancipation:

… Men of Yorkshire! … Men of England! Look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids … Fathers! … You would wish to be proud of your daughters and not blush for them—then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the maneuver, the mischief-making tale-bearer. Keep *your girls’ minds narrow and fettered*—they will be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you: *cultivate them*—give them scope and work—they will be your gayest companions in health; your tenderest nurses in sickness; your most faithful prop in age. (*S* 292-293)

Caroline addresses the men and fathers who are responsible for women’s education.

As Tara Moore explains, although traditional criticism tends to project Shirley as the
“central defiant figure” of the novel, in fact it is Caroline who exhibits “a greater force of unconventional expression because of her repeated defense of the female ability to rise above prescribed roles” (478). It is the seemingly silent and acquiescent Caroline who gives a feminist manifesto, whereas Shirley may exemplify the feminist model of her age. There is an interplay between the two heroines, where Shirley at first sight functions as the embodiment of Caroline’s manifesto/vision but also, at times, she voices patriarchal discourse. This clash between words and actions, which is evident in the construction of both Shirley and Caroline, is a recurrent issue in Brontë’s work. Brontë wants to instruct the reader on how to adopt a penetrative vision and see behind appearances; even quiet and seemingly compromised women like Caroline, who represents the majority of Victorian middle-class ladies, are able to think, to question and look for meaning in perspectives and definitions of womanhood that deviate from the established, patriarchal ideology. In addition, the construction of a version of Shirley who would be revolutionary both in words and actions, would have resulted in an extraordinary female character, almost marginal and impossible to believe, who would drastically undermine Brontë’s project on the realism of the “real,” “cool,” “solid” and “unromantic as Monday morning” (S 5) novel that Shirley aspired to be. Last, this specific construction of the two female heroines projects her experimentation and artistry: what remains in the reader’s mind is a synthesis of the two women; the strikingly independent “Captain” Shirley Keedlar, who is absent though in the first third of the novel, merged with the agonizing, though restless and deeply inquisitive consciousness of Caroline that we follow throughout the whole novel.

In addition, in Caroline’s warning to the fathers of young women, the issue of women’s social status and power as a deeply educational and intellectual issue is
negotiated in terms of mental space and representation of the mind. In her words: If you keep your “girl’s minds narrow and fettered” (S 293), your girls will be a disgrace to you—the opposite will happen, though, if you “cultivate” them, if you give them “scope and work” (S 293). So, women’s minds should stop being narrow, and women should be educated. Again the female mind appears in spatial terms; however, at this point it is clarified that it is not inherently narrow. It is kept narrow because of external conditions, but this situation is not irreversible. It can change on the grounds of education and work opportunities provided to women. So, Caroline once again voices a centrifugal discourse.

However, Shuttleworth does not regard Caroline’s position as provocative and offers a different reading of this scene, concerning women’s education. She reads in this scene another example of how class and gender issues are interconnected in Shirley: she claims that Brontë supports the conservative Tory idea that education should be offered to women only in order to fulfill their traditional roles and to the labour force only to perpetuate the smooth function of the prevailing hierarchical social system (Shuttleworth 202). In the same wavelength, Rogers claims that in Caroline’s Manifesto, Brontë attributes the responsibility for women’s plight to men, their fathers and husbands, and thus she offers as a solution to women a solution that involves paternalism and not rebellion (165). Nevertheless, I think that it is of vital importance that Caroline resorts to the only option available to her in realistic terms, that is, to claim a better education for women within the existing system. It is revolutionary on her part to demand education and occupation for women in an age when the only acceptable occupation for a middle class lady was marriage, “household work and sewing” and “unprofitable visiting” (S 391). In her words, it is female education that opens up the possibilities of a profession and trade and offers
alternative models of life to a restricted, stagnant female life as she describes in the following extract in which Caroline pinpoints the injustice in the treatment of girls and boys in a middle-class family:

“I feel there is something wrong somewhere. I believe single women should have more to do—better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now .... Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood ... The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do: their sisters have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health: they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness.” (S 390-391)

Once again, Caroline insists that the “narrowness” of the female minds and views is not an inherent quality of their sex, which can not alter and which signifies an inborn female subordination to men. Instead, her manifesto is placed in a framework that recognizes the established perceptions of womanhood as reversible and raises the issue of men’s social responsibility towards women. In the same framework belongs also her insistence and wish for a trade which opens up the prospects of the life of a woman and gives her scope:

“Caroline,” demanded Miss Keedlar, abruptly, “don’t wish you had a profession—a trade?”

“I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts.”

“Can labour alone make a human being happy?”
“No; but it can give varieties of pain, and prevent us from breaking our hearts with a single tyrant master-torture. Besides, successful labour has its recompense; a vacant, weary, lonely, hopeless life has none.”

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“But hard labour and learned professions, they say, make women masculine, coarse, unwomanly.” (S 229-230)

A trade and an occupation are viewed by Caroline not as a lucrative business, since she does not mention money at all, but as means to occupying one’s thoughts and filling one’s life with a pursuit which is emotionally educating and spiritually rewarding. It is this occupation and the satisfaction derived from it that makes Caroline wish to earn her own living. And although Shirley once again voices a centripetal discourse, it is Caroline who consolidates her wish for independence and places labour in an educational framework of spiritual and emotional satisfaction.

Therefore, centripetal and centrifugal discourses regarding definitions of womanhood develop in this prismatic text. In the spectrum of this text, Caroline’s mind is represented in the spatial terms of the camera obscura. As we follow Caroline’s consciousness in her process of maturation and self-education, the masculine, scientific and objective type of vision which is inherent in the camera obscura is disrupted in Caroline’s narration by subjective vision (prisms through which we view things), feminine epistemologies/discourses of superstition and mostly feminine fantasy narratives (the Woman-Mermaid and the Woman-Titan). This narrative mode, which merges realistic accounts of gloomy conditions of restriction with embedded liberating narratives of imagination (which explore inner wishes, propose alternatives and provide a channel of expression of what can not be expressed otherwise) offer Caroline a narrative model that enables her to voice her own questions and desires. At the same time, Caroline’s perspective is either
complemented or undermined by a second female perspective, that of Shirley, which
develops in a parallel way. Both perspectives merge in a narrative economy which, on
the one hand, foregrounds the restrictions and limitations that are experienced by
middle-class Victorian women, and, on the other hand, articulates criticism on these
conditions and proposes alternatives. At the same time, Brontë experiments with the
construction of a female model of independence and emancipation in the face of
Shirley, the limits of which she herself imposes so as not to undermine the realism
and plausibility of her own venture and render it from the beginning dismissed. Thus,
Brontë contributes to the novel by experimenting with spatial representations of the
mind, which draw on the camera obscura, in the space of which converging and
diverging voices and perspectives construct a prismatic narrative which is reflected on
a prismatic text. She resorts also to an experimentation of the synthesis of the two
main female characters, and their blended perspectives in order to discuss issues
regarding the education and emancipation of women, among others.

6. Mental Collapse and Mental Rebirth

The third volume of the novel starts with the culmination of Caroline’s inner
turbulence and frustration, that is, her mental collapse. Caroline loses her appetite, her
colour and her strength, and what appears to be a bodily weakness and collapse is in
fact emotional and mental illness. In Mrs Pryor’s words: “your mind Caroline is
crushed; your heart is almost broken: you have been so neglected, so repulsed, left so
desolate” (S 432). Caroline’s situation is the palpable result of a sensitive young girl’s
suffering, and the neglect of patriarchy towards the education and the mental health of
women.
But the neglect is twofold. Mrs Pryor who reveals at this point that she is in fact Caroline’s mother, who left her when very young because of insuperable problems with Caroline’s father, fails to recognize her own responsibility for Caroline’s educational and mental neglect. However, the mind plays a crucial role in the recognition of the alienation that both mother and daughter experienced. A new version of femininity is constructed in a definition of motherhood in which the mind emerges as a recognition sign between the long-lost mother and her daughter; the mind is the mystical bondage which defines matrilineage, the link between mother and daughter which excludes the father or any other male figure. In this case, Brontë experiments with a new definition of motherhood which is based exclusively on its relation to brain and mind. Mrs Pryor aligns her conceptualization of motherhood with “the male-centred and ancient-old idea that children of the brain are far more significant than children of the body” (Kitsi-Mitakou 1). So, Mrs Pryor attempts to shape her motherhood in this model since the fact that Caroline is the “child of the body” is almost effaced, whereas the fact that Mrs Pryor recognizes Caroline as a child of her own brain and mind is highlighted:

“… if I have given you nothing else, I at least gave you life; and I bore you—nursed you; that I am your true mother; no other woman can claim the title—it is mine.”

“But Mrs James Helstone—but my father’s wife, whom I do not remember ever to have seen, she is my mother?”

“She is your mother: James Helstone was my husband. I say you are mine. I have proved it. I thought perhaps you were all his, which would have been a cruel dispensation for me: I find it is not so. God permitted me to be the parent of my child’s mind: it belongs to me: it is my property—my right. These
features are James’s own. He had a fine face when he was young, and not altered by error. Papa, my darling, gave you your blue eyes and soft brown hair: he gave you the oval of your face and the regularity of your lineaments: the outside he conferred; but the heart and the brain are mine: the germs are from me, and they are improved, they are developed to excellence. I esteem and approve my child as highly as I do most fondly love her.” (S 433, my italics)

Caroline’s mother recognizes her heiress in terms of the mind, where any other kind of inherited property is effaced. Caroline emerges as an alternative heiress, parallel to Shirley; she does not inherit the name or the money from her father—she inherits the genes, the heart and the brain of her mother, and she gains her mother’s approval. Thus the mind appears as a valuable possession that is handed down from mother to daughter; Caroline’s mind becomes the space which contains the genes of her mother, that is, the most precious gift that a mother can offer to her daughter. But also the mother appears relieved and satisfied when she sees her own reflection not in her daughter’s face and body but in her mental potential.80

80 Her relief is even more evident, when she realizes that her daughter does not conform to the patriarchal presupposition that female beauty and mental power do not coincide. Mrs Pryor initially seems to embrace such a prejudice, and seems to be afraid of Caroline’s beauty: “A form so straight and fine … must conceal a mind warped and cruel” (S 437). So, in her opinion, beauty and a strong mind are not compatible. And to make her point clearer she goes on to comment: “I had little faith in the power of education to rectify such a mind…” (S 438). This is what she offers as an explanation for her being an “unnatural parent” (S 437), a pretence (not so convincing) for abandoning Caroline. As Sally Shuttleworth says, Caroline is treated like a commodity by her own mother (Shuttleworth 207). Mrs Pryor’s fierce possessiveness (“the parent of my child’s mind: it belongs to me”) and assertion of a right to ownership suggest that Caroline is once more being treated as a commodity (Shuttleworth 207). She has been appropriated as an instrument on her mother’s sexual struggles (Shuttleworth 207). Mrs Pryor is a catalytic character for Caroline, not only because of what she did but also because of what she failed to do, both as a mother and as a teacher. She didn’t look for Caroline for so many years, and she offers an explanation, apart from the personal problems with her husband, which sounds at least weird in our ears today and which echoes a patriarchal assumption that proclaims the shallowness of female beauty and the inability of women to become sufficiently educated. But also, she sought to appropriate the patriarchal tradition of patrilineage, reproducing the strict possessiveness and commodification of Caroline and especially her mind, a possessiveness which is a hindrance to maturation and independence. So, Mrs Pryor was an “unnatural parent” because of this unnatural approach to her role as a mother.
In addition, Caroline’s marriage to Robert is crowned by Robert’s recognition of Caroline’s mental power. The constant and powerful workings of her mind are now almost complete, all this (self) educational progress is recognized by male eyes, and Caroline’s mind is defined as reliable. Her husband, Robert Moore praises her mental capacity in a metaphor which underscores its reliability. He says: “[your head] … is a little thinking machine, most accurate in its workings: it boasts a correct, steady judgment” (S 605). Caroline’s mind is defined as a machine, as an accurate and reliable machine. It is not the unreliable, superstitious female mind but a trustworthy calculator. So, the representation of the mind and the epistemological discourse emerges as a means of justification of female power in the person of Caroline. Her mind is the means that enables Caroline to supersede her insecurity and inferiority feelings and by means of her mind she establishes herself and gains both the admiration and appreciation of the people closer to her: her own mother and her husband.

7. AN ENDING OF GAIN OR LOSS?

In the end of the novel, the narrative abandons the concentration on Caroline’s consciousness, or on Caroline’s and Shirley’s pursuits and becomes especially prismatic, broadening its focus. In the spectrum of the narrative of the last chapters, the voice of the narrator becomes dominant again. The narrator is again visible since, like a character, he listens to his housekeeper’s stories, reveals to the reader the private stories of the curates, talks of historical facts like the “warlike facts” (S 636) of Napoleon and Wellington, or he addresses the “Men of Manchester” (S 636) and describes the unrest of the financial, industrial and social context of that times. The
issue of change resurfaces and this time it is approached from a wider perspective; it is not simply a personal change of life and occupation as we have already seen in the case of Caroline. Now change permeates the whole context of the novel, from environment and setting to the historical and social context. The attitude towards this change is ambivalent: it seems as if the narrator cannot decide whether this is a change for the better or a change which leads to loss.

The end of the novel seems to be an ending of loss since both women are reduced to the status of ‘Mrs Louis’ and ‘Mrs Robert,’ as Shuttleworth holds (218). Besides, as Glen explains, even progress is depicted as loss in *Shirley* as the hopes and desires of the characters are “faded” into the distance of an irretrievable past (Glen, *Cambridge Companion* 131). Zlotnik contends that Brontë’s text both heralds and celebrates world-transforming changes and laments the slow speed with which these changes are occurring (Zlotnik 295). However, industrialism as a new alternative is questioned since the old patriarchal order remains intact and thus, *Shirley* depicts reality with all its inherent disappointments and disillusionments (Zlotnik 295).

As far as women are concerned, Zlotnik holds that in the end Brontë finds out that even if a woman is the owner of the means of production, patriarchy prevails (293). Although Shirley assumes masculine titles, she can never assume masculine power, so she remains marginal in a man’s world and she proves unable to escape the patriarchal model which she so feverishly rejects (Zlotnik 293). In the same line of thought, Shuttleworth contends that Shirley’s choice in the end is a choice of suffocation by marriage. Underlying the parallel between women and workers in *Shirley*, she holds that Shirley’s fall is more intense because, even though she has been given effortlessly the wealth and power the workers crave for, she compromises
Thus, in the concluding sections of the novel, the ‘taming’ of Shirley indicates that women, like the workers, are restored to their lowly place in the social hierarchy (Shuttleworth 212). Shuttleworth sees that subordination of women underlies the text of *Shirley* and that Brontë persistently offers radical visions of female potentiality in this novel, but she does that only to expose the illusory nature of such dreams. As a result no kind of feminist radicalism is supported in the text (213). As Taylor explains, Shirley embodies the contradictions of a woman endowed with male privileges and economic independence, yet still defined as a lady within Victorian culture (Taylor 89).

Elliot Vanskike reads *Shirley* within the framework of satire on the part of Charlotte Brontë: the juxtaposition of masculine and feminine genders in Shirley herself, as well as the disjunction between Shirley’s feminism and her submission to Louis in the end of the novel is indicative of the extent of Brontë’s satire (487). The scenes where Shirley demonstrates typically male characteristics such as independence, aggressiveness, and anger can all be seen as a preparation for the abrupt reversal of her depiction in the end (Vanskike 487). According to Vanskike, Brontë has created a character that seems unnatural and out of place in the nineteenth-century world and she did so in order to show us that it is the cultural assumptions about the role of women that are unnatural and out of place (487).

Nevertheless, the ending proves to be in fact an ending of gain at least as far as Caroline is concerned. Brontë does not allow Caroline to fall into the form of insanity so often associated with her state in popular and medical literature of the time and Caroline is saved from the inevitable fate of her emotional collapse—death, or permanent mental derangement—by the discovery of a new identity, since her long-lost mother rescues her from the orphan status (Shuttleworth 206, 207). Also,
although Caroline has little economic power, she marries the husband she has chosen and is in love with and her marrying him does not serve any purpose of “furthering a family alliance” (Gardner 417). Throughout the whole novel, what Caroline had repeatedly envisioned and craved for, was “some kind of change” and this eventually happens. In the end, she experiences the change that she has for so long desired: she finds her mother, gets married to the man she is in love with and plans to run, together with Shirley, a Sunday school and a day-school, a fulfilling occupation according to her expectations:

“Such a Sunday-school as you will have, Cary! Such collections as you will get! Such a day-school as you and Shirley, and Miss Ainley, will have to manage between you! The mill shall find salaries for a master and mistress, and the Squire or the Clothier shall give a treat once a quarter.” …

“Extravagant day-dreams!” said Moore, with a sign and smile, “yet perhaps we may realize some of them. Meantime, the dew is falling: Mrs. Moore, I shall take you in.” (S 644-645)

At least the text implies that in the end, she is satisfied, happy and complete and the prospects of her life, are broadly open in front of her, even if they will be realized with the help of her husband, as is the case also in The Professor and in Villette.

8. Conclusion

In Shirley social, political, financial and class issues merge with the discussion of issues like gender roles, marriage, womanhood, and motherhood forming a narrative spectrum which is filtered through the prism of the third-person narrator. In this narrative various voices and perspectives emerge, either converging or diverging, in
discourses which either oppose or support each other. In this turmoil of contesting voices and perspectives in a third-person narration, it is not easy to have access to the consciousness and the inner thoughts and feelings of a single character as it would have been in a first-person narration. Still, despite this difficulty, Brontë manages to enable her reader to access the consciousness and to track down a coherent line of thoughts in the mind of Caroline.

It is Caroline’s mind, consciousness and perspective that we predominantly access and it is her profoundly educational journey of self-knowledge and self-exploration that we follow throughout the whole novel. The representation of her mind is spatial and draws on images of the camera obscura. In its enclosed space, the prismatic narrative of education and self-knowledge which leads gradually Caroline to personal achievements and maturity emerges and many questions and challenges to centripetal, patriarchal assumptions of gender roles on her part are raised. Brontë and Caroline are at pains to show that the female mind is not inherently “narrow” or inferior to the male mind, but the mental capacity of women is exclusively the result of education and occupation offered to women. So, Caroline’s centrifugal discourse develops not only in the overt articulation of dissent in her Manifesto, but also in more covert ways like in embedded narratives of imagination, where fantasy opens up a new dimension where alternative models of womanhood are explored. Thus the objective, detached vision of the camera obscura and realistic narrative merges with the subjective, creative vision of an inquiring female mind that resorts to imagination in order to find new alternative ways of expression.

In this quest, Shirley’s discourse, which is either supportive or undermining of Caroline’s, is gradually constructed. The construction of two female heroines instead of one evidences Brontë’s experimentation and artistry. On the one hand, there is the
silent and seemingly compromised Caroline who in many occasions expresses centrifugal discourse and on the other hand there is the independent Shirley who functions within limits set by Brontë herself. This way, the characters, their actions and words are plausible for the nineteenth-century reader and the realist scope of the novel is not undermined. In the end, it is the synthesis of the perspectives of the two female characters that remains in the mind of the reader, that is, the fusion of the impressive independence of Shirley together with the inquisitiveness and restlessness of Caroline’s mind.

As far as personal progress is concerned, Caroline seems to achieve her goals. In her exploration and quest of knowledge and self-education, she finds her own voice, her own mother and the husband she desires. It is her mind which is foregrounded as a definitive factor in the restoration of matrileneage and mother-daughter bonding, leading to a new and experimental definition of motherhood, as well as a token of appreciation on part of her husband. Caroline’s epistemological quest is performed in various images and versions of the camera obscura. And this epistemological quest is revealed in a narrative which is full of embedded texts, changing attitudes of the narrator, shifts in points of view, which form a multicoloured and multiperspectival spectrum of narration. In this multicoloured narrative, the objective and detached vision of the camera obscura is disrupted by subjective vision, by narratives of imagination and fantasy that reveal her epistemological tools, which explore new alternative and traditionally female ways of knowing, such as instinct. At the same time, they explore alternative visions of womanhood and attempt to invest with words the “inexpressible weight” that burdens Caroline’s mind.
Chapter Five

Versions of the Camera Obscura in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*

1. *LUCY IN THE SHADOWS OF THE CAMERA OBSCURA*

The study of Lucy’s narrative of education and self-exploration in her highly private epistemological quest for (self-) knowledge is the study of the mind-representation and the visual epistemology it involves. The subject of this mental activity starts as an elusive, dispassionate subject hidden in the dark corners of literal as well as narrative spaces, observing, questioning and evaluating the world around her, unwilling to participate in active involvement. However, the dark, confined subject who obstinately insists on trusting solely her eyes as a means to acquiring knowledge, and who is struggling to regulate her viewing by attributing to it the authenticity of dispassionate objectivity, shows faint signs of trust also to subjective vision. This oscillation is slightly insinuated in the beginning of the novel and gradually subjective vision and the instinctive knowledge that derives from it become more suitable to accommodate Lucy’s vision as the narrative develops. Thus, the epistemological pattern employed by Charlotte Brontë in *Villette* seems to oscillate between Newtonian/Lockean and Romantic/Goethean models of perception and these are main constituents of the construction of a narrative of education as well as the subjectivity of the educator in *Villette*. Lucy, the female subject oscillates between the dispassionate observation of the camera obscura and the subjectivity of Goethean optics in her search for world, self-perception and knowledge.
The space of Lucy’s internal life reinforces the image of the mind as an enclosed space where an agent through observation struggles to understand, judges, evaluates people, their behaviour, their values and their choices in life. At the same time, this space/dark room offers the space for self-evaluation. As far as the representation of the mind and her acquisition of knowledge are concerned, the model of the camera obscura is employed vividly in the beginning of the novel. Lucy starts her narration as a dark, shadowy, elusive narrator, a silent observer standing as a disembodied eye, watching other people and situations around her in dark confined spaces, inhabiting in a sense versions of the camera obscura as developed by Crary (40-41). Lucy Snowe’s subjectivity in the beginning of the novel (in most of the first 6 chapters) reflects the detachment, the cool observation of the “exterior” world which characterizes the subject of the camera obscura according to Crary. In the dark room of her own mind which is metaphorically rendered in the enclosed spaces of the houses where she lives (Bretton’s/Miss Marchmont’s) in the beginning of the novel, Lucy inhabits a dark corner, functions as a shadow creature, marginalized and watching dispassionately and without participating in the outside world or interfering with the people who live around her.

*The “Veiled” Lucy Snowe Narrates* ... Lucy seems committed to concealment from her self, her readers and the external world (Shuttleworth 228). As Haller explains, Lucy unobtrusively surveys events, observes reactions, studies characters all as means of obtaining involvement without being an active participant (149). She takes the form of a “veiled” existence in situations where she can experience life but at a safe distance, in the shadow, where ‘unobserved she [can] observe’ (V 156) (Haller 149).
Lucy as a “veiled” existence has been the object of study and commentary by numerous critics giving rise to many discussions of the intricacies and complexities that Lucy’s “invisibility” presents for the reader. For example, critics like Jessica Brent claim that Lucy’s invisibility is not a position that she necessarily controls, but she assumes it when others do not really show any interest in interpreting her mystery, except perhaps for M Paul (95, n. 12). Brent claims that the prolonged elision of the first three chapters with Lucy’s virtual absence creates an effect of estrangement which frustrates “the reader's wish for the personhood and expressiveness of a sympathetic first-person narrator” (93-94). As the novel progresses, however, Lucy does begin to construct a more coherent identity, Brent claims. Namely, Villette appears to follow an anti-visual trajectory as Lucy’s position shifts from that of a passive spectator to the proper heroine and master of her own narrative (Brent 95-96). But even as Lucy becomes a more active narrator, unresolved visual desires and anxieties continue to disrupt her story, creating a schism between what she sees and what she says (Brent 95-96).

On the other hand, other critics consider Lucy’s invisibility as a manifestation of power and control. For example, Karen Lawrence considers invisibility as Lucy’s strategy to reverse the male gaze and avoid being textualized or read by it (95). First, Lucy calls herself a “cypher” (V 395), that is a non-entity or a riddle to be solved and by this act attributes insignificance to herself as a person (Lawrence 450). Second, Lucy is plain and thus she places herself in the antipode of the woman as image, that is as a spectacle (e.g. Cleopatra, Vashti), as an object to be looked at, or as a vision of beauty (e.g. Ginevra, Paulina). In this way, she challenges the pervasive ideology in our culture and the history of visual arts which confirms the position of woman as object rather than a subject, and as spectacle rather than a spectator (Lawrence 450).
So, Lucy’s invisibility is in fact a choice which endows her with power: because of her plainness she can reverse the gaze, and observe the “mystery” of the man rather than her being the object of the male gaze (Lawrence 451). Moreover, she becomes a kind of fly-on-the-wall focaliser gaining access of vision by virtue of her insignificance and thus exercising her powers of observation and interpretation, and becoming an observer who often sees what others can not (Lawrence 451). Thus, Lucy refuses the fate of spectacle and becomes a spectator herself (Lawrence 452).

I would like to argue that Lucy’s invisibility is part of her epistemological agency which enables her to construct an experimental female scientist-viewer within the walls of her camera obscura, who is absorbed in the construction of the body of her knowledge. It is the first of a series of viewing positions that she will experiment with throughout the novel, before she gradually moves to positions where she exposes herself, and can see as well as be seen. These viewing positions are made possible because of her profession as an educator.

In order to avoid the danger of being trapped in “stasis” however, Lucy struggles to become more than a spectator and be an observer (Boone 29). Crary’s distinction between spectator and observer is important at this point. As he explains, a “spectator” especially in the nineteenth-century context is a “passive onlooker at a spectacle, as at an art gallery or a theatre” (Crary 5). On the other hand, an “observer” is the “effect” of a system of possibilities and conditions, “one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations” (Crary 6). Thus, Lucy, in order to avoid the entrapment of stillness and

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81 Lucy hides her dreams from disapproving minds, but also constantly disguises herself as a shadow (Boone 28). Gilbert and Gubar claim that “in the course of the novel she has learnt to speak with her own voice, to emerge from the shadows” (434). However, as Boone notes, to retreat behind a mask of invisibility and coolness may be a defense mechanism against the imprisoning eyes of others, but it can also become a trap, another kind of prison, an entrapment in “the stasis of non-life, of a plotless existence” (Boone 29).
ignorance for the rest of her life, constructs an epistemological agent who occupies the dark site in the model of the camera obscura, and within this system she functions as an “observer” in Cray’s interpretation, when she meticulously observes, studies and contemplates the fields of knowledge and self-knowledge. However, as an observer she functions within the limits imposed on her by gender roles and social restrictions.

In the first chapters, where Lucy describes her life at her godmother’s house, she resorts to “cool observation” (V 16) of the people around her. Her action is described with verbs of vision like “I [would have tried to take] a peep” (V 10), “I observed” (V 11), ‘I did take notice” (V 11), “I watched Polly rest” (V 11), “It was curious to watch [Polly]” (V 12), “I witnessed” (V 16), “my eye followed [Paulina]” (V 26) and she describes how she would watch for hours Polly and Graham’s (her godmother’s son’s) games without interfering or participating (V 26, 27). As Brent claims, she fails to speak about herself or her history except through vague allusions in which she appears as a non-participating spectator closely eyeing the idiosyncrasies of Polly Home and Graham Bretton (93), a little girl, who is her godmother’s guest, and her godmother’s son. The two children share games and a close bonding, which Lucy is absorbed in observing from a distance, as a dark shadow without showing willingness to interfere and claim space for herself.

However, her emerging subjective vision, and her attempt to extricate herself from darkness is evident when she reveals the fact that, however passive an observer she appears to be, she begins to choose what to see, and declares: “I ceased to watch [Pauline] under such circumstances: she was not interesting” (V 27). Her initiative to choose what to see is going to take a clearer and more specific form later in the novel.
At this point again she withdraws to watching and “observing” (V 28) life at the Bretton home.

Therefore, Lucy takes the form of an epistemological subject which merges with the site of the enclosed spaces and shadows of her narrative. The “privatized subject, confined in a quasi-domestic space, cut off from the public exterior world” (Crary 39), takes form in Lucy’s figure. Besides, a decisive function of the camera obscura was to “sunder the act of seeing from the physical body of the observer, to decorporealize vision” (Crary 39). Lucy’s “decorporealization” is foregrounded since we have no description of her physical appearance in the first chapters—or throughout the whole novel for that matter. Even her name is not introduced until the second chapter, a strategy which reinforces the subjectivity of an indefinite, shadow-like Lucy, hidden and watching in the dark.

Lucy’s interaction with Polly and the rest of the people in the Bretton house was not one of active involvement but, as she herself explains, these people are the object of her study; when Polly left, Lucy explains that she was no longer allowed “the amusement of this study of character” (V 33). In this light, Lucy is like the scientist, the enquiring mind, who in the darkness of the camera obscura is absorbed in the study of the objects of his interest, observing them with detached objectivity.

The epistemological and educative narrative of the first chapters of the novels rounds off with a description on the part of Lucy of her own sources of knowledge and epistemological tools as developed until that moment of her life. During the last night before Polly’s departure from the Bretton home, Lucy is watching Polly sleeping and shares her thoughts with the reader:

“A very unique child”, thought I as I viewed her sleeping countenance […]

“How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she
bears the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books and my own reason tell me are prepared for all flesh.” (V 38, my italics)

This extract is quite ironic in the sense that the novel does not really answer these questions regarding Polly, but it is a narrative that answers these questions as far as Lucy is concerned. It is as if Lucy projects on Polly the anxiety and questions she herself has about her own future. In the novel, we actually learn how Lucy gets through the world and battles with life as well as how she bears shocks and desolation. As she lets us know, up to this point of her life her epistemological tools consist in books and the reason behind the dispassionate, objective gaze of the careful observer she has been so far. But are these tools sufficient? Is it enough to get through life only by means of books, that is, knowledge not gained by experience, as well as reason and objective dispassionateness? How important are emotion and subjective vision?

_Lucy’s “Askesis” in the Camera Obscura._ In the next stage of her life, after a lapse of eight years, about which the reader is given no information, Lucy is left all alone without family or means to support herself, and thus becomes the companion of an elderly woman, Miss Marchmont. Again, seclusion is what characterizes her life and once more she is placed in the position of the observer of another person’s life, since she had “to live there, in this close room, the watcher of suffering” (V 40, my italics).

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82 Lucy’s tendency is to live life through other people’s lives, or through literature, art and the theatre; Robert Colby pinpoints the contrast between the episodes that take place indoors—in lecture halls, concert halls, theatres, art galleries, and ball rooms—and episodes that take place in woods and gardens, particularly towards the end of the novel (R. Colby 414). In this bipole he sees the contrast between art as opposed to Nature, and he contends that it is M Paul who leads Lucy from literature and art into nature, that is from vicarious experience into direct experience, from imitations of life into life itself (R. Colby 414). So, Robert Colby reads in _Villette_ Lucy’s progress from living through literature to being immersed in real life.
The dichotomy between inside and outside world, which is a prerequisite in the camera obscura model (Crary 37, 43), dominates in Lucy’s perception since she is so absorbed with her life in the enclosed space where she lives, that she forgets the outside world. This literally enclosed space of the room becomes also the mental space within which her mental activity takes place. In a vivid description of interiority she says that “all within me became narrowed to my lot”:

Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty—her pain, my suffering—her relief, my hope—her anger, my punishment—her regard, my reward. I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an ever-changing sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick chamber; I was almost content to forget it. All within me became narrowed to my lot. Tame and still by habit, disciplined by destiny, I demanded no walks in the fresh air; my appetite needed no more than the tiny messes served for the invalid. In addition, she gave me the originality of her character to study: the steadiness of her virtues, I will add, the power of her passions, to admire; the truth of her feelings to trust. All these things she had, and for these things I clung to her.

(∗42, my italics)

In this enclosed space, the educational narrative continues, since Lucy as a studious, devoted scientist studies the originality of an old woman’s character, virtues, passions and feelings. By suppressing her own self and withdrawing in the corner of the chamber, the disembodied subject of the camera obscura emerges once again. As Crary stresses, the camera obscura defines the position of an interiorized observer to an exterior world (34):
What is crucial about the camera obscura is its relation of the observer to the undemarcated, undifferentiated expanse of the world outside, and how its apparatus makes an orderly cut or delimitation of that field allowing it to be viewed, without sacrificing the vitality of its being. (Crary 34)

In other words, the distinction between outside and inside world is clear (Crary 37). And Crary goes on to explain:

Above all [the camera obscura] indicates the appearance of a new model of subjectivity, the hegemony of a new subject-effect. First of all, the camera obscura performs an operation of individuation; that is, it necessarily defines an observer as isolated, enclosed, and autonomous within its dark confines. It impels a kind of *askesis*, or withdrawal from the world, in order to regulate and purify one’s relation to manifold contents of the now “exterior” world. Thus the camera obscura is inseparable from a certain metaphysic of interiority: it is a figure for both the observer who is nominally a free-sovereign individual and a privatized subject confined in a quasi-domestic space, cut off from a public exterior world. (Crary 38-39)

Lucy seems to give flesh to such a subject, isolated, enclosed and autonomous within the dark confines of the rooms she inhabits as well as the confined interiority of her own mind. Furthermore, Lucy’s “asketic” figure emerges in the first description of her external appearance in this chapter:

I saw myself in the glass, in my mourning-dress, a faded, hollow-eyed vision.

Yet I thought little of the wan spectacle. The blight, I believed, was chiefly external: I still felt life at life’s sources. (V 41)

Lucy’s asketic figure emerges, dark, faded and hollow-eyed. However, she is not a paralyzed, stagnant, passive recipient, but in fact as she confesses, she is eager to live,
study and learn. Lucy’s self-image emerges as still and tame (in her own words) fashioned as such by “habit and destiny” (V 42), but this, as she herself confesses is only the external appearance. Behind this external appearance lurks her inquisitiveness, her eagerness to know, her urge to live.

In fact, at this point, Lucy introduces one of the major themes of Villette; the discrepancy between illusion and reality, the difference between the external appearance of something and its real nature. This issue is dealt with in the novel not only in relation to other people and circumstances which prove different from what they first appear to be, but also in relation to the narrative when Lucy teases her reader and insinuates her own ‘reality’ should be questioned. Lucy herself underscores her own elusive nature in her inability to reach a self-definition: “I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature; but self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances” (V 40).

Lucy’s elusive nature is underscored by the fact that she is transformed into various personas that fit in to what is required by the given circumstances. For example she becomes a companion, a nursemaid, a teacher, a confidante, thus, according to Haller, she suppresses her true identity through concealment that is both literal and figurative (149). To the question of whether Lucy changes throughout the novel or remains steadfast, Haller contends that it is not easy to decide who Lucy really is, since she does not “lay it out for us at the start” but rather gives hints of her identity throughout the novel (158). This series of Lucy’s different identities, not only indicates her attempt to suppress her “real” identity as Haller holds, but in fact questions the very existence of a single identity in a person. As Shuttleworth explains,

83 Haller among many critics, holds that the major theme in Villette is the disparity between perception and reality, and this issue is reasserted by the presence of the image of the nun since her ‘ghost’ appears at circumstances where she represents Lucy’s unreality or inability to clearly see (156).
in *Villette* “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” (240). So, identity as Brontë has shown in *Villette* is not a given, but rather a tenuous process of negotiation between the subject and surrounding social forces (Shuttleworth 242).

I would like to argue that Lucy’s veiled existence is her epistemological disguise. Behind this ‘veiled’ creature, whose subjectivity is always in process and in flux, hides an inquiring mind and a female version of the subject of the camera obscura. In the first chapters of the novel, Lucy, like a scientist in the enclosed space of a dark room, observes and studies the objects, people and situations of her interest, offering thus a textual version of the interiorized and disembodied subject of the camera obscura, as Crary has defined it. However, she offers a female version of the subject of the camera obscura, undermining the preconception of the male scientist and reinforcing the conceptualization of the camera obscura as a domestic or semi-domestic space where knowledge is produced.

Lucy accommodates her perception to the textual version of Locke’s images of the mind as a domestic storeroom, in the image of the good housewife who stores information that interests her in her mind’s storeroom. Taking Walker’s interpretations of Locke’s metaphors of the mind as a point of departure, Daryl Ogden ascertains that the most “resonant articulation” of Locke’s philosophy of empirical knowledge was found in the tropes of space and furnishing and the profoundly feminized space of the domestic sphere in which they incur (29). Besides,

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84 As William Walker explained, the mind was perceived by Locke, as some kind of a domestic space within which an idea might be observed, or as a room in a house where the idea as a piece of furniture may be owned and observed (32). Another version of this spatial conceptualisation of the mind in Locke’s work was that of a storeroom where a labourer accumulated possessions, so, knowing was associated with possessing (Walker 43, 37).
Crary characterizes the camera obscura as a “semi-domestic space” (39). This domestic component of the camera obscura is textually reflected on the following discussion of the mind and mental activity on the part of Lucy. After Miss Marchmont’s death, Lucy consults with one of her own educators, her former nurse, and gathers information on governesses’ employment in European countries. Lucy, in her narrative, resorts to a representation of the mind which recalls the aforementioned Lockean metaphor for the mind as a domestic storeroom:

I stored up this piece of casual information, as careful housewives store seemingly worthless shreds and fragments for which their present minds anticipate a possible use some day. (V 50)

In this description, Brontë visualizes thoughts as material things that careful housewives collect for future use (Malane 74). She focuses on a particularly female mental activity and she suggests that the female mind naturally gathers information which might seem useless if examined by logic and reason but, according to what a woman thinks, they may be used later; thus Brontë depicts the mind as a domestic space (Malane 74).

So, in the first part of the novel which indicates the beginning of her own quest of knowledge in life, Lucy as an epistemological agent constructs the ambiguous female subject-knower. The agencies of both the male scientist, his dispassionate objective gaze, his knowledge conditioned by books and reason in the camera obscura of his experiments, as well as that of the meticulous, careful housewife who gathers information and ideas in the storeroom of her own mind, merge in Lucy’s image.

85 Representations of the mind which draw on the model of the camera obscura are employed both by Newton and Locke (Crary 40-41) as well as Locke’s metaphors for the mind in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Extensive analysis of Locke’s metaphors for the mind is included in William Walker’s book Locke, Literary Criticism and Philosophy.
2. TURNING A NEW LEAF: LUCY’S LIFE IN VILLETTE

If we read Villette as a novel of personal development (bildungsroman) we can see that it is mainly a novel of the heroine’s education in life. We follow Lucy’s progress not only from place to place but in fact from one professional post to another, seeing Lucy gradually gaining social status. She states her ambition as an epistemological agent in almost scientific terms; she sounds like a dedicated, male scientist claiming that: ‘I always, throughout my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth’ (V 564).

As we have already seen, in the first part of the novel, Brontë constructs an epistemological agent who occupies the dark site of enclosed literal and literary spaces in versions of the model of the camera obscura, and within this system she functions as an “observer” when she meticulously observes, studies and constructs her own knowledge and self-knowledge. Thus she participates in the “epistemological quest,” a term which, as Kearns contends, characterizes the Victorians since they were increasingly more interested in understanding how the human body, mind and society work together (Kearns 136-137). In this respect, the social network and social relations in Villette form a broad field within which Lucy’s epistemological quest is shaped. As Sally Shuttleworth explains, in Villette and in Lucy’s “spectral world,” perception is related with the social construction of identity (Shuttleworth 236). It is the social environment that forms the basis of Lucy’s visual epistemology; her interaction with the social world constructs both her knowledge and identity, however fluid and elusive it may appear, and signals her maturation and progress in life.

More specifically, Lucy seems to be ‘using’ other people to educate herself. For instance Polly, Miss Marchmont, and Paul teach her how to live with loss (Hodge
914). She leaves England in order to “extend her knowledge” but in fact she learns more than maths, German and composition while she studies at the pensionat (Hodge 815). It is romance which educates her in the sense that she experiments with the ideal of having a man as a mentor, as in the cases of Dr John and mostly M Paul. In addition, Madame Beck intrigues Lucy, functioning in the beginning as a role model for her. Although Lucy does not like the unhappiness that Paul causes to her during their tutorials, she recognizes his effectiveness, and expresses her desire to know, “her noble hunger for science,” the stimuli, the aspirations (Hodge 910). She tries to imitate him in her pedagogic techniques, for instance when she tears up unacceptable work and pushes a rebellious student into the closet, and becomes a teacher with a firm hand (Hodge 910).

So, in Villette, we follow Lucy’s progress in the public sphere; she starts as a lonely, parentless and friendless girl, becomes an old woman’s companion, then a traveller, then a governess, a teacher, and in the end, she reaches personal fulfillment not by a prosperous marriage but by establishing herself as a professional, in the leadership of an educational institution, that is, by opening and running her own school.

As she moves from England to Villette, Lucy gradually draws herself out of the shadows of the dark rooms of the enclosed spaces of the camera obscuras of both Bretton’s and Miss Marchmont’s house and gradually consolidates and solidifies her educational interaction with her social environment. What motivates her in such a courageous venture is her ambition and her realization that she has to explore “her

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86 An example of such education is what Hodge describes as Lucy’s education on melancholy. Hodge holds that Lucy’s motive to study other people is her “compulsory observation,” that is her obsession to observe the world around her in order to understand her own relationship to melancholic obsession (915). Hodge claims that she learns that melancholic obsession can be productive both as a source of creative and critical writing, and as a treatment against itself (915). In my opinion, this is one of the factors that informs her observation; what really motivates her is her ‘desire to know’ and learn.
prospects in life” (V 52). The reason for the decisive step forward in her advancement is an educational end, that is, the exploitation of one’s personal faculties:

I like the spirit of this great London which I feel around me. Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets, and for ever abandon his faculties to the eating dust of obscurity? (V 53)

What motivates her to seek ways to avoid epistemological inertia is her own feeling of responsibility towards her own learning capacities and her own potential to develop. The answer to the question that she poses is her moving to Villette and indeed the change in her social position and her attempt to avoid being a “coward” whose potential is absorbed in obscurity. It is this obscurity that she fights against, in a struggle to obtain knowledge and define herself as an epistemological agent.

_The Governess in Search of her Place in the Camera Obscura of her Mind._ It is important that when Lucy moves to Villette, she changes her social position. Lucy is employed by Madame Beck, the owner and directress of a school as a governess for her children and later as an English teacher for her pupils. So, Lucy as a governess shapes her own subject of the camera obscura which starts to take the idiosyncratic form of the professional female educator.

Some chapters in _Villette_, particularly the ones entitled “Madame Beck” and “Isidore,” are packed with details about school administration and classroom procedure (R. Colby 229). Usually discussion about governesses focuses on their ambiguous social position. As I have already mentioned, a governess experienced what Peterson termed as “status incongruence” because of her anomalous social position (Peterson 11). Governesses were neither members of the family nor servants, their charges were often rebellious against them, mothers were often jealous of
governesses and undermined their efforts, many parents had often been badly educated by their own governesses and this made things difficult for their children’s governesses (Thormählen 48). In addition, the fact that a respectable woman sought work as a governess because of need of some income, stamped her as a woman in need, as “impecunious” by definition (Thormählen 48) and reflected the fragility of the socio-economic situation in England (Brandon 13). Governesses were expected to accept their subordinate position, to show empathy and tact, and place themselves in the position of both children and parents (Thormählen 50).

In Charlotte Brontë’s fiction the occupation of the governess is described in dark colours; in *Jane Eyre* the River sisters are well educated women who are employed as governesses in families which are unworthy of them; in *Shirley*, Shirley herself, when Caroline expresses her intention to become a governess, exclaims in disdain: “Be a Governess! Better be a slave at once!” (Thormählen 50, 51). Charlotte Brontë who worked as a governess herself, when she wrote a letter on her experience claimed that a governess should have “a sanguine, flexible character,” “sturdy health” and “good strong nerves”; all these traits make a better governess than a long list of accomplishments (Thormählen 60). So the success of a governess was not so much a matter of formal education as it was a matter of being able to cope with the nature of the job (Thormählen 60). The choice of the governess as the agent who traces an epistemological quest, is of pivotal importance for Charlotte Brontë because it helps her highlight the social interaction of a woman with her environment and shows how she grows up and matures through education.

Brontë’s choice of a governess as an epistemological agent stresses the interaction of the subject with its social environment. We should not forget also, that education itself is associated with social interaction and personal progress and mostly
with someone’s social advancement in Charlotte Brontë’s fiction (Thormählen 72). It is important that she contrasted herself to the widely held view in the first half of the nineteenth century that a person’s place in society is God-given and that the poor should not have ambitions to rise in social terms (Thormählen 73). However, Charlotte Brontë makes it very clear in her novels that money and rank are irrelevant when we have to determine the worth of a person and that the description of a “good family” is justified when it co-exists with sound inclinations and good conduct (Thormählen 74). The most important quality in a Brontë character is the will to improve by seeking and undergoing an education of the mind and the heart and she stresses the civilizing powers of education and criticizes all those who deny less fortunate people the chance to improve by studying or working hard (self-improvement ethics) (Thormählen 74).

When Lucy becomes the nursery-governess of Beck’s children, she takes a decisive step into the scopic economy of the novel. She experiences objectification since she finds herself constantly under Madame Beck’s scrutiny. Madame Beck spies on her and her belongings, at the night of her arrival (V 76-77); as Lucy confesses: “I found myself an object of study: she held me under her eye” (V 84). Therefore, Lucy as a governess occupies an ambiguous position both in the public and the private sphere, both in obscurity and under scrutiny, but she also has the potential to undermine social order. The important shift in Lucy’s social and viewing position takes place when she becomes a school-teacher.

This is so because in Villette, Lucy Snowe as a governess and mostly as a schoolteacher, occupies what Anita Levy calls the “social space” that is the space

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87 The social emerged in the writing of the 1850s and blurred the distinction between the old terms of the “private” and the “public” (Levy 401). In the first half of the nineteenth century, (especially in the 1840s) in books written by the Brontë’s, Dickens, Gaskell, female literacy gave the opportunity to the literate woman to have the man she wanted, as well as to acquire goods and have babies, for example
between the domestic and the public sphere which is dominated by the “literate woman” in many instances of early nineteenth-century literature (406). Lucy ‘literalizes’ a new middle space which disrupts the traditional dichotomy separating the visible public space from the domestic invisible space (Levy 406). Lucy’s progress in life materializes in this space, locating her progress as she moves onwards from various professional posts as an educator: governess, English teacher and, in the end, the owner and headmistress of her own school.

The important point is that, as Levy explains, Lucy refuses spectacularization, but she also refuses to be invisible; so it is her classroom which signifies a space in which she can dominate (Levy 400). The ‘social’ is seen as an extension of the domestic and as such it is at odds with the masculine, political world; it was composed mainly of literate women who were concerned with doing good, having children and ensuring the future of the nation (Levy 401). So, in Villette, the schoolroom emerges as a social space under the control of the literate woman who negotiates between the extremes embodied in the figures of Ginevra on the one hand and Polly Home on the other (Levy 404). Both Ginevra, who makes a spectacle of herself, and Polly, who is invisible and over-sentimental, are unsuitable heroines, while Lucy emerges as a more suitable one (Levy 405). And as Levy explains, the schoolroom is dominated by a third category of woman, “neither strictly private nor overtly public, unseen or exposed, ‘good’ or ‘bad’,,” that is, the figure of the “literate woman” who moves from the invisibility of the domestic domain to find her place outside home (401). However, with the ambiguous ending of Villette, which defies

Jane Eyre (Levy 402-403). However, in the 1850’s there was a shift in this depiction of the literate woman; in novels like Villette, Levy holds that literacy prevents the woman from the social skills required in order to have a husband, babies and a household; it prevents the heroine from “fitting into a family, renders her unable to form or care for her own family, and permanently dislodges her from the domestic domain” (403).
marital bliss, Lucy challenges the perpetuation of “fitting in” the domestic domain that the “literate woman” propagates according to Levy’s definition.

The first time that Lucy assumes a vantage point of viewing, from which she can see as well be seen, is her first lesson as an English teacher. Lucy says that she “beheld” opposite her “a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather” (V 87) and the girls, “looking at ‘Miss Snowe’ they promised themselves an easy victory” (V 88). In this setting, where she can both see and be seen, action and reaction becomes feasible. This way, the vantage viewing position of the school-teacher enables her to establish a dialogic and interactive relationship with her students. Within the walls of the schoolroom which is a new version of the camera obscura, Lucy Snowe stops observing others while she herself remains unobserved, and starts to explore what lies beyond the withdrawal of the camera obscura where her eyes simply observe and reflect on what goes on around her. She experiments with and assumes a new social place and a more creative way of seeing things which involves her emotionally with her environment. The ‘governess status’ enables her to interplay with social positions, in and out of contexts, and exemplifies a multiplicity of female identity. This ambiguous social position reflects the way she sees, understands and informs her epistemological quest. She trusts the objective, penetrating and interpretative eye to bring her closer to knowledge, but she also disrupts her performance as an idiosyncratic subject of her own camera obscura. Gradually, she realizes that seeing is also a deeply personal and subjective process.

In order to succeed in this, Lucy constructs her epistemological quest in a series of versions of camerae obscurae in which she functions as the subject. She is an ambiguous subject accommodating herself in objective, dispassionate ways of seeing and at the same time gradually exploring and experimenting with ways of seeing
which are more subjective and intuitive. As soon as she becomes a governess and then a schoolteacher, she experiments with a perspective in her epistemological quest which is highly informed by her new social position.

Defying Surveillance and Espionage in the Camera Obscura. As soon as Lucy reaches Labassecour and Madame Beck’s house, she is exposed to an intricate system of surveillance and espionage employed by Madame Beck. As we have already seen, Lucy is drawn to settle in what she herself describes as a position where “unobserved I could observe” (V 156). In the darkness of the camerae obscurae of her narrative, she embodies a withdrawn subject which, unexposed, observes the world around her. However, in Labassecour Lucy has to confront and react to a context of surveillance and espionage which attempts to expose her, to disrupt and unsettle her viewing position, to question her role as an “onlooker of life” (V 143, 156), and drag her in the foreground away from the security of obscurity.

It is striking how intricate the system of surveillance and espionage that is constructed in Villette is. As Joseph Boone explains, Villette is a novel where vision is a dominating issue, it is a novel full of “spying eyes, knowing gazes and signifying glances” (22). Sally Shuttleworth recognizes three types of surveillance in Villette that are represented by: Madame Beck, who establishes her power in her school by means of practices of surveillance and espionage, Dr John and M Paul who can read signs and expose characters (Dr John as a doctor and M Paul as an expert in physiognomy), and the Roman Catholic Church

88 According to Joseph Boone, the Catholic Church keeps the “heretic” Lucy and Paul “under the surveillance of a sleepless eye” (V 503) and functions as a supervisory agent even greater than Madame Beck (24). The confessional booth where Lucy finds shelter is in fact another version of a spiritual Panopticon according to Boone (24).

88
When Lucy finds herself in such a new environment, she describes Madame Beck and her system of surveillance. Madame Beck is presented as a gifted manager who can run a school with admirable capacity. She is shrewd, capable and the whole system of students, teachers, parents, servants and her own children is presented as a machinery, which Madame Beck, although a woman, can handle/operate with success; the key to her successful management is a system of “surveillance” and “espionage”:

The establishment was both a pensionnat and an externat: the externes or day-pupils exceeded one hundred in number; the boarders were about a score. Madame must have possessed high administrative powers: she ruled all these, together with four teachers, eight masters, six servants, and three children, managing at the same time to perfection the pupils' parents and friends; and that without apparent effort; without bustle, fatigue, fever, or any symptom of undue, excitement: occupied she always was—busy, rarely. It is true that Madame had her own system for managing and regulating this mass of machinery; and a very pretty system it was: the reader has seen a specimen of it, in that small affair of turning my pocket inside out, and reading my private memoranda. "Surveillance," "espionage,"—these were her watchwords. (V 80, my italics)

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89 As far as educational practices are concerned, surveillance and espionage were considered to be effective methods of managing a school and controlling its pupils. As M. Thormählen holds, in Victorian education surveillance was useful as an educational tool, in the sense that teachers would ask parents to pay attention to the early detection and “eradication” of disobedience and other “evil tendencies” in their children, by having them “under incessant surveillance” (41). From an educator’s point of view, boarding schools like M Beck’s school kept parental interference to the minimum degree (Thormählen 63). M Beck retained overall control in her school, not only thanks to her extensive intelligence policy which she applied in her institution, but also by careful personnel management since when she was satisfied with somebody she had hired she would keep him in his or her post and do the opposite in cases of educators with unsatisfactory performance in their duties (Thormählen 63).
Madame Beck appears to be the dynamic directress of the school, in the figure of whom feminine and masculine qualities merge, forming thus an androgynous image. Apart from the capable operator of intricate “machinery,” she could have been either a “prime minister” or a “superintendent of police” who wears a “man’s aspect” (V 86). These characterizations depict an ambitious woman who adopts a stereotypically male behaviour (Litvak 473):

I say again, Madame was a very great and a very capable woman. That school offered her for her powers too limited a sphere; she ought to have swayed a nation: she should have been the leader of a turbulent legislative assembly. Nobody could have browbeaten her, none irritated her nerves, exhausted her patience, or over-reached her astuteness. In her own single person, she could have comprised the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police. Wise, firm, faithless; secret, crafty, passionless; watchful and inscrutable; acute and insensate—withal perfectly decorous—what more could be desired? (V 82, my italics).

So, under the influence of such a system and such a strong-willed directress, Lucy finds herself in the web of Madame Beck’s surveillance. We should note that in Labassecour, Lucy’s habitual sense of powerlessness and inarticulateness is intensified (Lawrence 462). Lucy is literally deprived of her language since she is an English girl in a foreign country and thus her situation is emblematic: she is the powerless female without the keys to the culture or the power of its privileged discourse (Lawrence 462). This makes her vulnerable to preying eyes, to Beck’s surveillance as well as to her students’ gazes.

But when Lucy becomes a governess her viewing position shifts, from being a subject hidden in the obscurity of her own camera obscura, where she surveys and
focusses on objects of her own study and scrutiny, to being the object of Madame Beck’s study:

Again she became silent; but looking up, as I took a pin from the cushion, I found myself *an object of study: she held me under her eye; she seemed turning me round in her thoughts—measuring my fitness for a purpose, weighing my value in a plan*. Madame had, ere this, scrutinized all I had, and I believe she esteemed herself cognizant of much that I was; but from that day, for the space of about a fortnight, she tried me by new tests. She listened at the nursery door when I was shut in with the children; she followed me at a cautious distance when I walked out with them, stealing within ear-shot whenever the trees of park or boulevard afforded a sufficient screen: a strict preliminary process having thus been observed, she made a move forward. (*V* 84, my italics).

So, the first person who challenges Lucy’s viewing position is Madame Beck. Lucy herself becomes an object in Beck’s mental space, where as an idea/object in Locke’s terms, she can be “turned around in [Beck’s] thoughts,” “measured” and “weighed.” While placed in the “nursery obscurity,” as a nurse-governess of Beck’s children, Lucy cannot defy such a gaze. It is only when she adopts a new viewing position as a schoolteacher who can see and be seen that she can achieve this. When Lucy is asked by Madame Beck whether she would accept the post of the schoolteacher, she renounces her diffidence and accepts the challenge:

I might have said “Yes,” and gone back to *nursery obscurity*, and there, perhaps, mouldered for the rest of my life; but looking up at Madame, I saw in her countenance a something that made me think twice ere I decided. At that instant she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's. Power
particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits, and that power was not my kind of power: neither sympathy, nor congeniality, nor submission, were the emotions it awakened. I stood—not soothed, nor won, nor overwhelmed. It seemed as if a challenge of strength between opposing gifts was given, and I suddenly felt all the dishonour of my diffidence—all the pusillanimitiy of my slackness to aspire. (V 85-86, my italics)

The fact that Lucy constantly seeks ways to be unseen constructs an ambiguous viewing subject because this position, on the one hand, justifies her stereotypical feminine timidity but on the other hand, it is stereotypical of patriarchal power, that is, of “the power to objectify and scrutinize others while exempting oneself from similar treatment” (Litvak 476). It is Lucy’s transition from the post of the governess to that of the schoolteacher which is important in terms of spectatorship because, when the governess becomes a teacher, she learns the contradiction which is usually experienced by actors, whether professional or not, that is, the contradiction between “the vulnerable self-presentation and necessary self-concealment” (Litvak 478). The Schoolroom equates to a theatrical stage according to Litvak (478) where Lucy can see and be seen.

This shift in her viewing position, where she can see and be seen instead of seeing unseen, is crucial for the formation of her selfhood, her self-education and epistemological quest. It is important that Lucy is gradually drawn out into light, gradually abandons her complete invisibility and is engaged in social activity since, as Sally Shuttleworth explains, Victorian selfhood\(^90\) is a private state of being which is

\(^90\) Also space constructs the basis for the formation of the self in Brontë’s novels, according to Karen Chase. As she explains, spatial relations form the basis upon which the complexity of the self appears. In Brontë, the self has emotions, faculties and dispositions only because it also has a geography (Chase 91). As she adds, “such central issues as desire and judgment, romance and bildung, receive the most compelling expression in images of distance and proximity, low and high regions, sight and sightlessness, compartments and thresholds, doors and windows and most generally in terms of
achieved through the social act of exchange (Shuttleworth 39). In the antipode of this exchange Brontë seems to obsessively circle around the relationship between concealment and selfhood where the external gaze simultaneously constitutes a threat of dissolving the self (Shuttleworth 39). In other words, Brontë seems self-conscious of her self as an object to an external eye, whose gaze she must nevertheless baffle if she wants to retain integrity of selfhood (Shuttleworth 39). Therefore, in her novels there is a constant interplay between exposure and concealment of the self and in this context the notion of the “penetrating eye” as well as surveillance and espionage assume an important role.\(^9\)

Lucy’s centrifugal tendency to keep her self intact, hidden and concealed acts in constant competition with the competing centripetal forces of the penetrating, skilled and educated eyes of Madame Beck, Dr John, M Paul who attempt to unravel and disclose the core of her selfhood, either successfully or not. This constant interplay informs aspects of her own self, her own perception of the world, her narrative and in the end the reader’s perception of Lucy. This unstable and constantly changing interaction, according to which Lucy defends herself from viewing and others attempt to invade her privacy, constructs the unstable and elusive nature of selfhood that we, as readers, perceive in Lucy’s character. In the same framework, we can say that both the social environment and the surrounding characters in Villette form the background against which the “colours”/qualities of the main protagonist are projected. Like in drawing, the intensity and the quality of these ‘colours’ are closely related with and defined by the background ‘colours’ of the other characters.

\(^9\) Shuttleworth associates the skilled eye with the medical eye of Dr John (45-46), as “the skilled eye of the detective, like that of the doctor, unlocks the details of the external form of the invisible to the untrained eye, which reveal the secret history hidden below” (Shuttleworth 46).
Seeing and Being Seen in the Camera Obscura: Lucy’s Schoolroom. The shift in Lucy’s social and viewing position is signaled by her undertaking of the task of the English teacher in Beck’s school. In the following extract Lucy describes her first lesson as an English teacher. She enters a new version of the camera obscura, which is neither a domestic chamber nor a nursery room, but that of the schoolroom, where the subject is not withdrawn and disembodied in the darkness, dispassionately studying the objects of her interest, but brought in the foreground. Lucy is placed on a platform, “mounts” on a privileged viewing position where she can both see and be seen and continues her epistemological and self-educating quest from a new perspective. Her physical presence is evident and the gender of this new epistemological agent is foregrounded as well.

Her description of the first lesson is conveyed in visual terms and her contact with her students is established mainly and predominantly in the field of vision. What she sees in front of her is a threatening “row of eyes” (V 87), and she reduces her students’ physical appearance to no other trait than their “insolent” eyes. She feels ignorant of the language that these eyes speak, so her alienation is established on the level of language also. So, the question of whether dialogue between the two parties, teacher and students, can be established or not is left open:

As I mounted the estrâde (a low platform, raised a step above the flooring), where stood the teacher's chair and desk, I beheld opposite to me a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather—eyes full of an insolent light, and brows hard and unblushing as marble. The continental "female" is quite a different being to the insular "female" of the same age and class: I never saw
such eyes and brows in England. Madame Beck introduced me in one cool phrase, sailed from the room, and left me alone in my glory. (V87, my italics) Her ignorance and lack of education in reading her students’ eyes and gazes opens up a field which she will have to master rapidly. The lesson that she is going to have is a study of the recurrent theme in Villette, that is, the disjunction between appearances and reality:

I shall never forget that first lesson, nor all the under-current of life and character it opened up to me. Then first did I begin rightly to see the wide difference that lies between the novelist's and poet’s ideal ‘jeune fille,’ and the said ‘jeune fille’ as she really is.

It seems that three titled belles in the first row had sat down predetermined that a bonne d’enfants should not give them lessons in English. They knew they had succeeded in expelling obnoxious teachers before now; they knew that madame would at any time throw overboard a professeur or maitresse who became unpopular with the school—that she never assisted a weak official to retain his place—that if he had not strength to fight, or tact to win his way—down he went: looking at ‘Miss Snowe,’ they promised themselves an easy victory.

Mesdemoiselles Blanche, Virginie, and Angélique opened the campaign by a series of titterings and whisperings; these soon swelled into murmurs and short laughs, which the remoter benches caught up and echoed more loudly. This growing revolt of sixty against one, soon became oppressive enough; my command of French being so limited, and exercised under such cruel constraint.
Could I but have spoken in my own tongue, I felt as if I might have gained a hearing … \((V^87-88)\)

The students’ hostile attitude is communicated to their teacher by means of their “looking” at her and through their gazes they state their determination to win a victory against her. Soon, Lucy’s ignorance proves elusive, or rather she gradually proves intelligent enough and a good student since she perceives their hostile signals and reacts to them successfully. By the end of the lesson, she will manage to control her class, by tearing up the composition of one of the three leader pupils and by locking another non-cooperative pupil in a closet at the back of the classroom. She controls her class with a firm hand, and successfully wins her post as an English teacher at the Pensionnat. Madame Beck all this time had been listening and “peeping through the spy-hole” exercising her spying and surveillance tactics:

‘C’est bien,’ said Madame Beck, when I came out of class, hot and a little exhausted. ‘Ca ira.’ She had been listening and peeping through a spy-hole the whole time. \((V^89)\)

So, Lucy’s first lesson is of pivotal importance for the construction of her selfhood as an epistemological agent, experimenting with new viewing positions, perspectives and means of perception. With such experimentation, she propels her epistemological quest and contributes to the knowledge economy of the novel.

As Jung explains, knowledge economy is very important in *Villette*, because it forms the basis of the juxtaposition between Lucy and Madame Beck. Jung focuses on this juxtaposition in order to see how each character trades knowledge and how authority is constructed through participation in a knowledge economy (Jung 161). Charlotte Brontë engages the figure of the governess (and teacher) in order to construct an identity of intellectual and emotional independence that allows Lucy both
to think and feel (Jung 161). Madame Beck’s system is read within the context of a complex notion of the gaze, and at the same time it refashions the woman as manager not only of the household but of the institution as well (Jung 161). Also, she is perceived to be a role model of female decency and morality but in reality she cares little for morality and the value of truth, unless it “be the truth that she can construct to appear to best advantage” (Jung 161). Thus, Madame Beck is another example of the disjunction between illusion and reality.

In general, knowledge in *Villette* is in most cases a means of power and control (Boone 24). In a world, as it is described in *Villette*, where everybody constantly watches everybody else, the greatest private gratification seems to be the violation of other people’s privacy and superior power is making sure that those people who are “spied-upon” know that the spying eye has penetrated his or her inmost secrets (Boone 20). As we have seen, an example of such a control is Madame Beck who consolidates her power by means of knowledge, in the form of her “ghost-like” surveillance; she is an invisible, all-seeing omnipresence seen by no one, like the surveilling eye in Bentham’s Panopticon (Boone 23).

Knowledge and its acquisition is an important issue which underlies *Villette’s* narrative on many levels. Lucy’s epistemological quest involves her experimentation

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92 According to Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, early nineteenth-century society, maintained its power by making each of its citizens an agent of surveillance and observation: as we police each other, we internalize the law and become our own policing agents (Boone 21). Foucault’s key-symbol of a disciplinary society is the Panopticon or the central watchtower, originally designed for contemporary penitentiaries (Boone 21). The question of whether such mechanisms of supervision are part of the textual operations of novels is central in D. A. Miller’s influential *The Novel and the Police*. Miller uses Foucault’s theories to argue that the Victorian novel is completely entangled with the disciplinary measures it represents (Boone 21). The reader occupies a privileged position as reader-observer, outside and above the text and spies upon the private conversations of characters (Boone 21). Joseph Boone recognises in *Villette* various versions of the Panopticon which serves the surveillance construction of power on behalf of various characters. For example, Lucy occupies her own Panopticon that is the children’s nursery room, her “watchtower” (*V* 83), as she calls it, from where she makes her “observations” (Boone 25) and she can have a view of the world without being seen. Also, Paul’s study functions in the same way, as he can have a view on the garden of the school which he calls his “book”: “my book is this garden; its contents … female human nature” (Boone 22).
with various viewing positions within various versions of the camera obscura, like the schoolroom as already discussed, or the theatrical stage as will be discussed shortly.

**Performing in the Camera Obscura.** Apart from the schoolroom, it is also the theatrical stage which supports the ambiguity of the female educator in *Villette*. As Litvak explains, the novel’s thematics of teaching and governance overlap and merge continually with the thematics of acting and spectatorship (Litvak 471). The narrative in *Villette* maintains an opposition between the disciplinary activity of the governess/teacher on the one hand and the “flamboyant career of the actress” on the other hand (by juxtaposing Lucy with the actress Vashti or the shallow and narcissistic Ginevra), but at the same time, it keeps undermining this opposition, by placing the teacher on stage (in Lucy’s performance at the school fete) (Litvak 472). In *Villette*, the schoolroom and the theatre are primary spaces of interest, which the novel conflates as much as it separates them (Litvak 472). Both the schoolroom and the theatrical stage coincide in the new vantage position of viewing that they offer to Lucy.

Lucy’s narrative which describes her first months in Madame Beck’s school reveals her continuous experimentation with viewing positions within the enclosed spaces of the pensionnat’s classrooms, nursery rooms, and dormitories. On the one hand, Lucy experiments with modes of exhibiting herself, as we have already seen: her schoolroom is an enclosed space where, as a teacher, she occupies a vantage position where she both can see and be seen. Lucy refuses spectacularization but she also refuses to be invisible, so she dominates in her classroom (Levy 400). At the same time, she remains a withdrawn subject, finding solace in modes of self-
repression, isolation and “looker-on” positions, and avoiding social contact with other colleagues:

The whole day did I wander or sit there alone, finding warmth in the sun, shelter among the trees, and a sort of companionship in my own thoughts. I well remember that I exchanged but two sentences that day with any living being: not that I felt solitary; I was glad to be quiet. For a looker-on, it sufficed to pass through the rooms once or twice, observe what changes were being wrought, how a green-room and a dressing-room were being contrived, a little stage with scenery erected, how M. Paul Emanuel, in conjunction with Mademoiselle St. Pierre, was directing all, and how an eager band of pupils, amongst them Ginevra Fanshawe, were working gaily under his control. (V 143, my italics)

However, her withdrawn attitude is disrupted when she responds to M Paul’s appeal to replace a student who was ill, and she exposes herself overtly on the stage by participating in the vaudeville organized for Madame Beck’s birthday. Lucy experiments with a new viewing position this time. On the stage, she can be seen, and she performs in front of an audience, however, she remains quite concealed, since she impersonates a male “fop”; she performs the part in an androgynous way, dressed in both male and female clothes. Again she avoids complete spectacularization, since, even though she is the spectacle/actress, she continues to observe the world around her, turning thus the audience into her own spectacle. She sees Dr John and reacts to his gaze:

93 Litvak holds that the vaudeville itself effaces the division between audience and spectacle, compromising thus the hierarchy according to which those who see exercise epistemological and political mastery over those who are seen (479). As I would like to argue, in fact the boundaries are merging, and Lucy who is seen also sees, observes and learns, functioning thus as an epistemological agent in self-education.
The spectacle seemed somehow suggestive. There was language in Dr. John's look, though I cannot tell what he said; it animated me: I drew out of it a history; I put my idea into the part I performed; I threw it into my wooing of Ginevra. In the "Ours," or sincere lover, I saw Dr. John. Did I pity him, as erst? No, I hardened my heart, rivalled and out-rivalled him. I knew myself but a fop, but where he was outcast I could please. Now I know I acted as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer. (V 155)

Lucy uses the space of the schoolroom where the play takes place as a camera obscura; she uses the vantage position of the stage where everybody sees her performing, as a viewing position at the same time. She does not remain blind on stage, absorbed in what she has to express during her performance, but instead, she seeks glances and gazes from the audience. Not only does she perceive and interpret such glances but also she reacts to them, since they seem to fuel her energy and the quality of her acting and her performance.

This way, the schoolroom, where the play takes place, becomes an idiosyncratic camera obscura, where the subject does not choose a dark side to observe but rather a stage which she uses both as a Panopticon, where she sees everybody and at the same time she is exposed and she is seen performing. What is produced in this camera obscura is knowledge, a highly self-educating experimentation which leads to new aspects of self-perception for Lucy. As Lucy confesses to the reader immediately after her performance:

What I felt that night, and what I did, I no more expected to feel and do, than to be lifted in a trance to the seventh heaven. Cold, reluctant, apprehensive, I had accepted a part to please another: ere long, warming, becoming interested, taking courage, I acted to please myself. (V 155-156, my italics)
Lucy learns to get involved and make the experience of performing in public a self-gratifying experience, abandoning thus at least temporarily her position as a disinterested, dispassionate and cool observer. However, disruption lurks, since immediately after the play, Lucy retreats again to the position of “the looker-on at life”:

Yet the next day, when I thought it over, I quite disapproved of these amateur performances; and though glad that I had obliged M. Paul, and tried my own strength for once, I took a firm resolution, never to be drawn into a similar affair. A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by, and fastened them in with the lock of a resolution which neither Time nor Temptation has since picked. (V 156, my italics)

Moreover, in the ball which follows immediately after the performance, Lucy resorts to her usual post, and hidden from other people’s eyes she goes on observing everything and everybody around her who is reduced to a mere spectacle. In this reversal of viewing positions, the audience, for whom Lucy was a spectacle before, now becomes a spectacle which she “unobserved could observe”:

Withdrawing to a quiet nook, whence unobserved I could observe—the ball, its splendours and its pleasures passed before me as a spectacle. (V 156, my italics)

However, she will not remain in this position for long. Graham Bretton asks her to become his own instrument of “watching over” and “observing” Ginevra (V 165) and at the same time he “calls upon her to step out of her role as objective observer” and
asks her for her opinion about his chances to be loved by Ginevra (Parkin Gounelas 49). This is important not only because she is forced to get decisively involved in the real life of the people around her but also because it is an incident which frustrates her feelings for Dr John. The confession of his love for Ginevra forces Lucy to realize that it is Ginevra that Dr John is interested in and repress her own feelings for him.

It is evident that tension is created in Lucy’s attempt to accommodate herself in viewing positions which will serve better the purposes of her epistemological quest and self-education. She constructs for herself an ambiguous epistemological subject who oscillates between coverage and exposure and experiments with viewing positions during the construction of her epistemological agency.

Lucy’s Confession Booth: the Text as a Camera Obscura. At the end of the school year, and after a strenuous period of hard work and exams, everybody leaves with their families and friends for the summer/autumn vacation and Lucy is left alone in the Pensionnat, in the company of a little retarded girl and a servant. During this long vacation, Lucy experiences loneliness and isolation to the highest degree. In the dark narrative of that period, the text becomes Lucy’s camera obscura where she narrates and explores her own self. The object of her study is her own self, her emotions, thoughts and mental state as she tries to regulate her own feelings. The receiver to whom she reports her findings is the reader, whom she addresses directly more than once. She consciously exposes her narrative, her thoughts and opinions to the multi-coloured spectrum of her readers and their subjective reading, which is tinted by each reader’s perspective:

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

The first month was, indeed, a long, black, heavy month to me. (V 173)

As soon as she is left alone, she realizes that the little retarded girl emerges as a threatening figure; this girl forms a mirror which reflects Lucy’s fear of incapability, of “lethargy” and “inertion,” which is what the girl’s “brain, eyes, ears and heart” suffer from (V 173). It is this inertia, this “deadly paralysis” (V 174), as well as the girl’s “propensity to evil” (V 174) that rises threatening to her nervous system. The little girl functions as an occasion that, on the one hand, draws her in seclusion, depression and isolation but, on the other hand, gives a concrete form to her depressed mental state and fears against which she eventually reacts. Therefore, it becomes a force which urges her to seek consolation and other alternatives in her life that can save her from her emotional unrest.

As soon as the little girl is taken from the Pensionnat by her aunt, Lucy is relieved from the “heavy charge” (V 174), the “tax and the trial” (V 174), and the “mental pain” (V 174) that she had experienced because of this girl. So, Lucy is free to walk out and explore the city. As Karen Chase explains, Brontë seems to regard confinement as a threatening alternative for Jane Eyre whereas prospect and open spaces seem to be her saving alternatives (88). This motif is repeated in Villette since Lucy seeks the “city-gates” (V 174) and passes them in her attempt to escape confinement and loneliness. She starts to realize that confinement may be a consolation but also a threat to personal evolvement.

However, the city and the open fields do not offer a solution to Lucy’s unrest. Instead, she seems to find consolation in an enclosed space again, that of a Catholic
Church and its confession booth. The confession booth becomes another type of camera obscura, where Lucy struggles to see dispassionately, study and explore her own self, her feelings, thoughts and emotions. As she herself explains, she decided to confess for the “mere relief of communication” (V 179). Confession takes the form of a Lockean representation of the mind: the mind pours out into a vessel the ideas/objects which had been accumulated in the enclosed space of the mind/storeroom (W. Walker 50). In Lucy’s own words what releases and consoles her is:

... the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused—had done me good. I was already solaced. (V 179)

As far as the representation of the mind is concerned, Brontë looks at “the fluctuations in the interchange” between the brain and its surroundings—what comes in, out and generally how the membrane is regulated” (Malane 77). She shows that what the mind needs is an outlet and that overtly tight boundaries are a threat to mental health (Malane 77). For example, Dr John later in the novel argues that Lucy’s “nervous fever” results from “severe repression of the mind and enforced solitude” (V 202) (Malane 77). So, Lucy uses confession to release this mental pressure and her brain “erupts” under pressure, so that its contents are “poured out” into the Catholic confession booth (Malane 77). This is in accordance with the framework of Victorian preconceptions regarding mental health and “female bodily economy,”

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94 Malane claims that Brontë’s conceptualization of the brain is quite gendered, claiming that there is a flux of the “brain’s contents” in the sense that Lucy experiences her thoughts as entities entering her mental space as a lodge receives new tenants, (75). So, Brontë understood the brain as permeable and thought of the female brain in particular as more porous (permeable) than the male one (Malane 76). She considers both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe as having permeable minds (76) and claims that Brontë in the case of women’s madness (for example Bertha’s madness), describes the inadequate maintenance of mental boundaries which leads to insanity, madness, lack or boundaries and unrestrained emotional eruptions (Malane 77). However, when Lucy questions herself about her sanity we can not but think of Shuttleworth’s consideration that in Villette, unlike Jane Eyre, madness is seen in relation to social environment and not as an innate fault.
maintaining that the mental and physical health of a woman depended on freeing the body from any kind of obstructions to the “free circulation of internal energy” (Shuttleworth 89). So, the confession booth becomes for Lucy a ‘safety valve’ where she relieves all this emotional pressure and then collapses mentally.

At the same time, the confession booth is another version of the camera obscura where the female subject exposes her thoughts, which are, however, concealed from the reader since we have no access to her actual conversation with the priest. What seems to be important for Lucy, and what she thinks worthwhile sharing with her readers, is the educational outcome of this experience. She observes and exposes her own thoughts regarding the issue of religion, which is important for her self-education and spiritual growth; Catholicism was especially visible in the mid-nineteenth century (Heady 358), and Brontë was engaged in an anti-Catholic spirit in *Villette*. As Emily Heady holds, for Brontë an error which was inherent in Catholicism was its focus on the externals, on bodies instead of minds, on the outer life at the expense of inner life (358). In Lucy’s overt criticism of the Catholic Church we read:

… the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning. ‘Eat, drink, and live!’ she says. ‘Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me. I hold their cure—guide their course: I guarantee their final fate.’ A bargain, in which every true Catholic deems himself a gainer. Lucifer just offers the same terms: ‘All this power will I give thee, and the glory of it; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou, therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be thine!’ (*V* 141)
In this extract, Lucy expresses her concern about how Catholics encourage children to “spend time in gym class rather than in critical thought” (Heady 358). Thus, she provides her anti-Catholic discourse with arguments and reasoning against Catholic appreciation for the surface and form. However, in the confession booth her anti-catholic feelings are disrupted by her appreciation for the priest and the gratitude for his kindness and support which stand above dogmas at that crucial moment of her frustration:

That priest had arms which could influence me: he was naturally kind, with a sentimental French kindness, to whose softness I knew myself not wholly impervious. Without respecting some sorts of affection, there was hardly any sort having a fibre of root in reality, which I could rely on my force wholly to withstand. Had I gone to him, he would have shown me all that was tender, and comforting, and gentle, in the honest Popish superstition. Then he would have tried to kindle, blow and stir up in me the zeal of good works. I know not how it would all have ended. [...] There was something of Fénélon about that benign old priest; and whatever most of his brethren may be, and whatever I may think of his Church and creed (and I like neither), of himself I must ever retain a grateful recollection. He was kind when I needed kindness; he did me good. May Heaven bless him! (V 180)

Yet, although she feels gratitude for the priest, her attitude is in fact ambivalent since by the end of the chapter she resorts again to her anti-catholic stance, giving in to her fear for the priest’s intentions to convert her. Joseph Boone sees the confession booth as a type of a spiritual Panopticon of social control, where the Catholic Church puts under surveillance and control Lucy’s thoughts and emotions (24). Lucy manages to evade such a control and articulates a “heretic narrative” that works against “the
authorizing agencies that would discipline her life and normalize its telling” (Boone 31). She continues to evade categorization and a fixed identity, and by means of this heretic narrative in fact she attempts to construct herself as a subject who avoids being objectified by the privileged male gaze and the ubiquitous surveillance in a patriarchal society (Boone 31).

What is important is the fact that Lucy experiments with religion, she criticizes but also discusses her anti-Catholic prejudice and adds a new, more mature and sophisticated religious attitude to her “epistemological quest” for self-education. What is important is the fact that after this experience, Lucy is able to define her narrative as a “heretic narrative” (V 180). She is able to ponder on issues related to religion, define her own stance towards Catholicism and thus consolidate her religious orientation; however, immediately after this experience, she gives in to actual and total disorientation, gets lost in Villette and collapses.

3. Versions of the Camera Obscura

Lucy in the Camera Obscura of her Mind and Text: the Subject of the Mental Chamber in La Terrasse. In the beginning of the second volume, Lucy recovers from the mental collapse that she has experienced when she fainted on the stairs of the church. She regains consciousness and finds herself in a chamber which she can not recognize. This chamber is a version of the camera obscura and represents her mind. The furniture that surround her and occupy the room represent the ideas in her mind. In the beginning she attempts to construct a narrative based on what she observes around her. This way she attempts to accommodate herself in the position of the subject of the camera obscura, as Crary defines it: as a disembodied subject, that is,
hidden in the dark who dispassionately observes what goes on around her. However, soon this attempt is disrupted. Through a process of defamiliarization, she becomes both the subject and the object of her own viewing and narrative. She seems to merge with the rest of the room and become part of the furniture of the whole room. Therefore, the room becomes a representation of the mind as a bipartite entity, comprising both the site and the agent of knowing and mental activity, as William Walker has defined it. Lucy is an ambiguous epistemological agent, both the subject and the object of her mental activity.

Lucy’s narrative in her description of the chamber is highly visual. Her “returning sense of sight came upon” her, “red, as if it swam in blood” (V 185). Lucy recovers from her mental collapse in the chamber where she can see many items of furniture which she observes and examines in every detail. Gradually, this room becomes almost “spectral” (V 185) giving her the feeling that it is both familiar and unfamiliar, as she gradually realizes that she somehow has been transferred to her godmother’s house in Bretton. The surroundings of the place in which she recovers are full of objects which she recognizes, as she has seen them before in her godmother’s parlor. The reader is given a description of a typical Victorian parlor, which is full of a collection of objects which make a house look more like a museum than a real home (Badowska 1514). The description of the furniture in the room is fully detailed:

And here my eye fell on an easy-chair covered with blue damask. Other seats, cushioned to match, dawned on me by degrees; and at last I took in the

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95 Lucy’s disorientation in La Terrasse, and her recovery are described like an intermediate stage between blindness and comprehension, as if recovering from an operation in the eyes; optical confusion is succeeded by a sequence of revelations in the narrative while opacity becomes transparency (Inglis, Ophthalmoscopy 368). In the end of the episode, everything seems to be restored back into focus (Inglis, Ophthalmoscopy 368).
complete fact of a pleasant parlour, with a wood fire on a clear-shining hearth, a carpet where arabesques of bright blue relieved a ground of shaded fawn; pale walls over which a slight but endless garland of azure forget-me-nots ran mazed and bewildered amongst myriad gold leaves and tendrils. A gilded mirror filled up the space between two windows, curtained ample with blue damask. In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face. It was obvious, not only from the furniture, but from the position of windows, doors, and fireplace, that this was an unknown room in an unknown house. Hardly less plain was it that my brain was not yet settled; for, as I gazed at the blue arm-chair, it appeared to grow familiar; so did a certain scroll-couch, and not less so the round centre-table, with a blue-covering, bordered with autumn-tinted foliage; and, above all, two little footstools with worked covers, and a small ebony-framed chair, of which the seat and back were also worked with groups of brilliant flowers on a dark ground. (V 186)

According to Eva Badowska, the “surplus of narrative details” in the description of the room in which Lucy recovers consciousness serves two purposes: on the one hand, it fosters a “reality effect,” since, as she explains based on Barthes, “the plenitude of seemingly insignificant details serves to signify the real” (Badowska 1514). On the other hand, it undermines the very sense of reality. As Lucy says: “too weak to scrutinize through the mystery, I tried to settle it by saying it was a mistake, a dream, a fever fit” (V 187). So, the sense of reality is undermined by creating an unreality and dreamlike effect (Badowska 1514).
Even later when Lucy recovers for a second time in another chamber, she appears as a sort of museum object while the actual objects of the chamber are “personified” (Badowska 1515) looking at her, as in the example of “a toilette-table [which is] dressed, like a lady for a ball, in a white robe over a pink skirt” (V 189; Badowska 1515). Again, as Badowska explains, the furniture and the whole chamber fluctuate between reality and unreality since all “these articles of furniture could not be real … they must be ghosts of such articles; or …. There remained to conclude that I had myself passed into an abnormal state of mind” (V 189) (1515).

Apart from the fluctuation and the ambiguity in Lucy’s perception of reality and unreality, all the items of furniture in the two chambers are of pivotal importance to how Villette represents the problem of subjectivity (Badowska 1515). Badowska agrees with Heather Glen who notes that in this chapter and in the scene where Lucy regains consciousness, “the self is experienced less as subject than object” (Glen, Imagination 226; see also Badowska 1515):

Verbal agency belongs not to the viewer, but to the objects she confronts. Chairs ‘dawn’ upon her, an armchair ‘grows’ familiar (V 186), ‘a whole shining [tea]-service glance[s] at her familiarly’ (V 197); things obstruct upon her vision even as she tries to turn away (V 190). ‘Obliged to know’, ‘compelled to recognize’ that which ‘hovers before’ its ‘distempered vision’ (V 189), self is experienced less as subject than as object—‘laid . . . on a sofa’, reflected in a mirror, ‘bewildered’, ‘harrassed’, ‘alarmed’. (Glen, Imagination 226)

The sense of hallucination in the chamber is not produced by a strange and magnificent spectacle, but by the appearance of the familiar in an unfamiliar place (Glen 226). Although they are familiar objects, seen before and even made by the
narrator, they appear as unfamiliar; so what is expected to be a moment of recognition, in fact becomes a moment of defamiliarization and dislocation (Glen 232). Therefore, as Badowska explains, Lucy’s interiority is linked to the parlor by a paradoxical principal of “mutual exclusion,” where the reality of the furniture implies the unreality or “abnormality” of Lucy’s mind and vice versa (Badowska 1515).  

In this context of mental and visual confusion, as well as of defamiliarization and dislocation (so finely discussed by Glen and Badowska), this episode is of pivotal importance, since it is a metaphor of the reconstruction of Lucy’s mental and perceptive abilities and her epistemological agency, following the unfortunate event of her mental collapse on the stairs of the church. In *Villette*, and mostly in this chapter, the representation of the mind draws on Locke’s conceptualization of the mind as a camera obscura. Lucy develops a highly visual narrative, starting from complete ignorance: “At first I knew nothing I looked on” (*V* 185). Then, the chamber is revealed gradually to Lucy and all the objects and furniture are explored and examined through her eyes. She struggles to construct her subjectivity, her history and feelings by means of the items of furniture that she observes.  

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96 However, the furniture seems constitutive of Lucy’s identity even though the mind and the furniture “throw each other into doubt” (Badowska 1515). *Villette* seems to employ the metaphor of the mind as a kind of inner parlor or drawing room, but Badowska holds that it differs from Locke’s representation of the mind as an unfurnished “dark room … not much unlike a Closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left” (Locke 158; Book 2, chapter 11, paragraph 17). This is because Lucy herself appears as a piece of furniture in the parlor of her mind, as she sees herself in the mirror (Badowska 1515). Also, the parlor of the mind is never unfurnished, and the mind is a room only insofar as it is cluttered with historically specific objects (Badowska 1515). Badowska sees in this instance an example of the fetishism of furniture, where the objects or furnishings, exteriorize the subject and are passionately invested with meanings for the reason that they are the subject’s projections (1515).

97 Before they come into focus and before she recognizes them, the objects around Lucy are threatening to her disoriented and “poured out” subjectivity; Lucy’s subjectivity is restored only when she personally connects with the materiality of these “relics”; recognizes them and remembers her happy times in her godmother’s house in Bretton (Crowther 134). This passage is an example of how profound the interrelationship of Lucy’s subjectivity and her environment is. They almost merge, constructing the Lockean representation of the mind, which comprises both the site and the agent of the mental activity, as Walker describes it.
seems to lack complete control of her vision and sight, as Heather Glen notices, and her vision is “distempered” (V 189) and “baffled” (V 189), she continues to resort to it as the ultimate epistemological tool that can help her reconstruct her subjectivity and recollect and reactivate her perceptive abilities, almost like an automaton:

I should have understood what we call a ghost, as well as I did the commonest object: which is another way of intimating that all my eye rested on struck it as spectral. But the faculties soon settled each in his place; the life-machine presently resumed its wonted and regular working. (V 185, my italics)

In her narrative, the chamber where she wakes up is like a camera obscura, where Lucy as a subject in Crary’s terms stays in a corner, in a position where as a scientist she “explored” (V 186), “examined” (V 190), and strove to “discover” (V 191).

At the same time, the construction of her subjectivity is disrupted by means of her objectification and defamiliarization when she sees her image in the mirror, as Heather Glen has pinpointed (Imagination 226):

In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face. (V 186)

By observing her image in the mirror she becomes the object of her own observation, part of the rest of the room and the items of the furniture that she has been observing. In this version of the camera obscura, she becomes both the site and the agent of her mental activity and perception. Thus, she embodies a Lockean representation of the mind, where she stands ambiguously as both the subject and the object of her own perception. After her mental collapse, this narrative describes her effort to regulate her feelings and collect herself. Lucy’s narrative of her mental collapse, despite its
hallucinatory overtones, signifies a new beginning, the recollection of her mind as an epistemological subject in Lockean terms.

When Lucy gives her perspective of her mental collapse, she focuses on her desolation and she uses scientific discourse, that is scientific (“current”) and medical terms (“aneurism”). Her need focuses on “companionship,” “friendship” and “counsel” (V 206), and she realises that she can not fulfill such needs in the isolation of a “closet” or a “chamber” which is the representation of the mind she has employed so far. She finds no consolation, friendship or companionship in a closet or chamber, that is, in searching alone inside her own mind, and she seeks to construct her subjectivity in interaction with the social environment. So, what she needs is a new conceptualisation of her mind:

… as to my confession, Dr. John, I suppose you will think me mad for taking such a step, but I could not help it: I suppose it was all the fault of what you call my ‘nervous system.’ I cannot put the case into words, but my days and nights were grown intolerable: a cruel sense of desolation pained my mind: a feeling that would make its way, rush out, or kill me—like (and this you will understand, Dr. John) the current which passes through the heart, and which, if aneurism or any other morbid cause obstructs its natural channels, seeks abnormal outlet. I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel. I could find none of these in closet or chamber, so I went and sought them in church and confessional. As to what I said, it was no confidence, no narrative. I have done nothing wrong: my life has not been active enough for

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98 Such terminology draws decisively on current theories of physiological psychology; and Lucy’s interpretation is founded on the metaphor of a medical explanation of insanity as a morbid obstruction of the channels of the mind (Shuttleworth 234).
any dark deed, either of romance or reality: all I poured out was a dreary, desperate complaint. (V 206-207, my italics)

Lucy questions here the effectiveness of the subject she has so far constructed for herself, and seeks new, more open fields of knowledge, self exploration and self education. These take the form of new and various versions of the camera obscura, which now transform into art galleries, concert halls and theatres. Under the pretence of art viewing in these venues/cameras obscurae, she studies both herself and alternative forms of femininity.

"The Cleopatra": the Picture Gallery as a Camera Obscura. In the version of the camera obscura as a picture gallery, Lucy oscillates between art and science, and this shapes her perception and epistemological agency. She employs scientific methodologies to appreciate art and different versions of femininity. By using as a starting point the traditional binary opposition, according to which science is associated with masculinity and art with femininity, Lucy discusses the relationship between the two and ends up blurring their boundaries (Lydon 29). In the art gallery that Lucy visits together with Dr John, she turns into an inquiring subject of the camera obscura/art gallery, who constructs her own knowledge by means of a scientific methodology. The object of her study consists in versions of femininity that she encounters in the pictures she views and in consequence she explores the potential of her own selfhood; thus Lucy herself becomes both the object and the subject of her own enquiry.

In chapter nineteen which is entitled “The Cleopatra,” Lucy describes her visit to a picture gallery in Villette. Her guide to the gallery is Dr John, who is a man of science, a doctor, who is able to offer “penetrating” knowledge of “galleries, salles
and cabinets,” museums and halls (V 221) in Villette. His knowledge of issues of culture, science and art, is the traditionally masculine knowledge ascribed to an efficient man-knower99 who penetrates beyond the surface, searches and explores in order to reach any hidden Truth. As Sally Shuttleworth explains, “the rhetoric of unveiling and penetrating the truth, [which was] so prevalent in nineteenth-century science, is located [in Villette] as a discourse of gendered, social power: male science unveils female nature” (Shuttleworth 220).

It is this gendered perception of science with which Lucy begins the narration of her visit to the art gallery. She uses as a starting point the traditional stereotypical discourse which is related to discussions about knowledge. She declares: “I never had a head for science, but, an ignorant, blind, fond instinct inclined me to art” (V 221). She clearly underscores the traditional epistemological convention which draws a line and separates two poles:

- science vs art
- head vs instinct
- masculine vs feminine

She places herself on the feminine side, which aligns the Female with Art (not science) and her epistemological tool to approach and assess art is instinct, the traditionally feminine way of approaching knowledge and truth.101 However,

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99 Joseph Boone claims that it is Dr John’s “manly knowledge” that attracts Lucy sexually but at the same time it is a disturbing sign of the “inherent inequality in their relationship” (32). As I argue, it is this epistemological inequality that Lucy questions in her quest for knowledge and in the construction of her own epistemological agency.

100 Art was used to refer to any kind of skill: painting, drawing, engraving, sculpture, music and writing (Lydon 20).

101 Lydon claims that Charlotte Brontë seems to draw on the Victorian assumption that women are occult and this occult scientific knowledge that women were supposed to possess existed in antithesis to Victorian scientific research that sought empirical explanation conducted by men (24). When Lucy remarks to Paul that “I … feel a knowledge of my own” (V 394), she draws on this notion that women have supernatural knowledge (Lydon 24). Lucy also draws on supernatural knowledge when she
Charlotte Brontë attempts to disrupt the gendered distinction between art and science over the course of her novel and in blurring these binaries, she strives to question the Victorian perception of men and women (Lydon 20).  

In the nineteenth century, art was seen as the opposite of science and its organized method, it was opposed to technology and was associated with feeling, sensibility, the inner life, and was often thought to embody human interest that was non-utilitarian (Lydon 21). Art was often associated with the aesthetic, the value of something for the sake of its beauty, rather than with utility (Lydon 21). So, at a first glance, throughout *Villette*, science is associated with male characters whereas art is often aligned with female characters, as Lydon holds (21).

In the nineteenth century, knowledge was quite gendered, and subjects like the classics for example, were not usually taught to girls (Thormählen 122). The basic differentiation between boys’ and girls’ education was a matter of goal and life destination, that is, boys were expected to be educated for the market place whereas the girls should acquire accomplishments (like drawing, music, needlework) which would make a girl more valuable in the marriage market (Thormählen 104). Such accomplishments (like e.g. playing the piano and singing) were especially important because they were an ‘innocent’ occupation, and in the marriage market they were the means through which a woman could attract attention, evoke admiration and be admitted in fashionable company (Thormählen 104). For her husband they were important means of amusement and entertainment in an era when entertainment was not easy to have; also, an accomplished wife would render his home attractive to new connections and his associates (Thormählen 104).

Lydon refers to many examples in *Villette* where the gendered conceptualization of knowledge is evident: Mr Home is a competent scientist in contrast to his wife, Mrs Home who could not comprehend his experiments in the lab; Dr John is a good doctor but he does not comprehend the feelings and emotions of Lucy; Polly is not interested in science, in contrast to her father and his friends (21). Also, Lucy frequents art galleries and finds personal fulfillment in theatrical experience and many female characters in the book find personal expression in art and not in science (Lydon 22). On the other hand, men use their scientific skills to make their way in the world financially but they can not read human nature as well as women do (Lydon 22). So, Lydon holds that science often excludes and alienates women in *Villette*, whereas art seems to attract them, and this is evident in Lucy’s phrase that she had “no head for science but a blind instinct for art” (22). However, as I would...
Lucy believes that her “inclination” (V 221) is a “blind instinct” to art, and this blurs the binary of the gendered conceptualization of knowledge; art, especially paintings and pictures, can be appreciated mainly (if not exclusively) through the eyes so this instinct cannot be blind. What she calls an “ignorant, blind instinct” (V 221) is rather a raw material, an uncultivated and uneducated potential to appreciate art. Lucy’s narration in the following pages exemplifies that in fact she educates her instinct to art. And she does so by employing a methodology which reminds us of the procedures that scientists follow while experimenting in their labs, and which involves observation, “active interrogation of nature,” asking questions and drawing conclusions (Cohen and Westfall 147). As Lucy explains, she was happy in the galleries not only “admiring” the pictures as a passive spectator, but mostly “examining, questioning, and forming conclusions” (V 222) when viewing the pictures. As Kromm says, Lucy describes “the mental processes involved in viewing art” (Kromm 384), in which she:

- dismisses the pressures of aesthetic orthodoxy, preferring instead a contemplative, heterodox aesthetic experience. For Lucy, art viewing represents the right to exercise one’s thinking capabilities independent of the cultural establishment’s pre-set standards. (Kromm 385)

In this framework, the picture gallery becomes a schoolroom, a camera obscura where the subject is left alone to study: “I liked to visit picture galleries and I dearly liked to be left there alone” (V 222).

Besides, Lucy stresses the epistemological function of the gallery by saying that what she admires in art are “fragments of truth” (V 223), features that can communicate insights about the nature of their subject to the viewer (Kromm 385).
Such a communication, Jane Kromm stresses, depends on the function of interpretation in *Villette*; the novel extensively presents the reader with observations, reactions, judgments and comparisons, where the nature of the visual phenomena and experiences “are repeatedly under scrutiny” (Kromm 376). “When provoked by paintings, these critical disquisitions worry the notion of realism as a singular objective proposition and instead insist on its multiplicity and unreliability, its dependence on the spectator’s orientation” (Kromm 376). Thus the gallery transforms into a camera obscura, a place of examination, education and interpretation and critical thought where the subject searches for truth and questions subjective perception.

Two case studies, employed by Lucy, demonstrate her ability to be a meticulous and careful researcher, and show how she applies this scientific-like methodology to art. The first instance is the picture entitled “The Cleopatra,” the “queen of the collection” (*V* 223):

One day, at a quiet early hour, I found myself nearly alone in a certain gallery, wherein one particular picture of portentous size, set up in the best light, having a cordon of protection stretched before it, and a cushioned bench duly set in front for the accommodation of worshipping connoisseurs, who, having gazed themselves off their feet, might be fain to complete the business sitting: this picture, I say, seemed to consider itself the queen of the collection.

It represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought, than the life. I calculated that this lady, put into a scale of magnitude, suitable for the reception of a commodity of bulk, would infallibly turn from fourteen to sixteen stone. She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have
consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; she appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks; she could not plead a weak spine; she ought to have been standing, or at least sitting bolt upright. She, had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material—seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery—she managed to make inefficient raiment. Then, for the wretched untidiness surrounding her, there could be no excuse. Pots and pans—perhaps I ought to say vases and goblets—were rolled here and there on the foreground; a perfect rubbish of flowers was mixed amongst them, and an absurd and disorderly mass of curtain upholstery smothered the couch and cumbered the floor. On referring to the catalogue, I found that this notable production bore the name ‘Cleopatra.’ (V 223-224)

Cleopatra is a picture of woman as meat in the figure of the “well-fed,” overweight queen (Kromm 387). Lucy seems aware of the process of objectifying the woman which is however sanctified as art (Kromm 387). The painter represents Cleopatra in a mess, among “the clutter” of “pots,” “pans” and “rubbish” that surround her (Levy 398), as a bulk of meat, overweight and sensual, stressing thus her material and not spiritual aspect. Dames contends that the painting of Cleopatra represents the excess of body and mass of flesh (375). As Aimilia Mohd Ramli explains, Cleopatra seems imprisoned inside the western painter’s gaze and form, and the painting exposes a dilemma for Lucy: Lucy may desire to be sexually attractive to the male characters, like Cleopatra, while at the same time, she recognizes that the desirable woman
remains enslaved to the demands of patriarchy (Ramli 123-124). As Lawrence explains, Lucy as a plain woman is not considered attractive enough to be viewed by male viewers neither is she the centre of attention, whereas Cleopatra is closer to the woman as image, that is as a spectacle, an object to be looked at and a vision of beauty (450). However, Lucy subverts this stereotype while viewing the picture, as she assumes a masculine point of viewing, that of the subject-viewer. She develops an almost scientific methodology which consists in “examining, questioning, and forming conclusions” (V 222) as mentioned before. Therefore, her vision is not the reflective gaze of self-identification with the picture of Cleopatra as one would expect. Instead it is a creative gaze, posing questions on what is seen and leading to conclusions (the picture’s rejection). However, although she assumes a masculine agency she does not adopt a masculine point of view/reading of the pictures. The “Cleopatra” painting in the gallery represents a portrait of a woman on public display carefully emphasizing the spectacular, yet unacceptable, character (Levy 395) which Lucy does not endorse.

M Paul is alarmed that Lucy is even permitted to look at the picture of Cleopatra, rebukes her and thus underlines the position that women’s visual access to art must be supervised and limited if “civilization’s high moral tone is to be maintained” (Kromm 387). Lucy’s viewing of the painting and her being rebuked for it shows, as Ramli explains, the Victorian fear that European women viewers of

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On the one hand, “The Cleopatra” picture episode exposes the unfair portrayal of women as powerless, enslaved subjects of male despotism; on the other hand, it suggests that even a portrait can become an agent of self-empowerment for women if they identify with its subject (Ramli 121). As Judd explains, female empowerment is realized in this case, when the female viewer, by projecting herself into the position of the represented figure, forms a fantasy in which she is able to feel herself encapturing the attention of a male voyeur by means of her beauty and sexuality (10). Similarly the female viewer might relive a moment in which her own femaleness and innate sexuality is “enraptured and consequently subjected a man to an explicitly female form of power” that of a love goddess (Judd 10). Lucy confronts Cleopatra with ambivalence: she both identifies with and distances herself from the male gaze (Dames 375).
Orientalist art may identify with the Oriental ‘Other’ in a need to feel as ‘desirable’ as this ‘other’ which is depicted (122). But it also shows the Victorian fear that women viewers may find excitement in observing men “being captivated by the female subjects of the Orientalist art” (Ramli 122). Although Lucy does not comment on the picture of Cleopatra in a positive way, she is keenly attracted to the figure of Cleopatra and she projects this desire on de Hamal whom she sees admiring the queen (Ramli 122). Ramli argues that not only does Lucy share his admiration for Cleopatra but also she experiences pleasure from watching him desire her (122).

In this complex network of gazes and looks, where Lucy seems to be both repelled by and drawn to the image of the sensuous exotic queen, she develops her own scientific way of viewing the picture in a gallery that is transformed into a camera obscura. Lucy is aware of the objectification of Cleopatra but develops her own methodology to approach her in an almost scientific way. She recognizes this objectification and at the same time castigates it. She seems repelled by Cleopatra’s obesity, idleness, by the mess that surrounds her. She does not identify with her, and tries to construct her identity in the antipode of this racial ‘other.’ Lucy appropriates Cleopatra, the ‘shallow’ Ginevra, the ‘over-sentimental’ Polly, the ‘traditional’ women in the “cadres” as we shall see shortly, in order to define what she is. Lucy approaches the Cleopatra picture critically; she analytically comments on it, sits on the bench “wondering at it” (V 224) and “studying” it (V 224), forms her conclusions, and in the end rejects the picture because it soon “tires” her (V 224). This scientific “cool” detachment and her “self-posssession” which is like a young man’s (“garcon”) (V 225) way of looking at the picture is reflected on her countenance, and she is rebuked for it by her teacher, M Paul. In this respect, male patriarchal authority rushes
to suppress even the hint of scientific detachment on the face of the female spectator, and the employment of scientific discourse on the part of a woman.

M Paul attempts to manipulate and educate Lucy by introducing her to a second set of pictures, which are considered as more appropriate for a young woman to look at. These four “cadres” depict stereotypical women, that is a ‘young girl,’ a ‘wife,’ a ‘young mother’ and a ‘widow,’ making thus explicit the acceptable roles for women as ascribed by men. The rhetoric of these pictures is “commercial, propagandistic and complacent” as Gilbert and Gubar point out (420, 421). Lucy rejects them as “insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless entities!” (V 226), as she questions these roles assuming a vantage point of spectatorship, looking at them with the “audacity of a young man.” Again, her gaze is not reflective, she does not identify with them but rejects them as “brainless nonentities” (V 226). The whole gallery transforms into a camera obscura/schoolroom where Lucy as a scientist/student/viewer, educates herself by means of her own gaze and her response to the objects of her gaze. By means of her viewing she deconstructs these “brainless non-entities” and places them in the antipodes of the literate woman, the educator who is an “entity” and has “brains.” According to Lucy, the depicted women are “hypocrite[s]” (V 225), “burglars,” “ghosts,” “brainless nonentities” (V 226). Her criticism on these representations of woman culminates in their complete effacement (they are “nonentities”) and the rejection of their epistemological standpoints (since they are “brainless,” they have no mental capacity to know anything). At the same time, Lucy places herself on the opposite side, she is “real”—both sincere and an “entity,” not a fake ideal—but most of all she has the “brains,” the mental capacity to know, to produce original ideas since she does not function like a “burglar” who steals ideas from others. The originality of her ideas is a key aspect of what she terms “a
knowledge of my own” (V 394), as I would like to argue later in the following chapter.

So, the ignorance that Lucy ascribes to her epistemological standpoint in the beginning of her visit to the gallery is reversed by the end of her visit. The gallery with the pictures becomes a place of education for her. She develops a scientific discourse and exhibits not passive admiration but an inquiring mind which explores and studies with scientific detachment and scrupulousness the object of her research.

What starts as a binary opposition, constructing two disparate spheres of epistemological interest and practice—the masculine/science/head as opposed to the feminine/art/instinct—is introduced only to be disrupted. This is achieved through Lucy’s appropriation of a scientist’s standpoint who approaches the object of his/her ‘survey’ and ‘studies’ it by means of a scientific methodology. The space of the gallery turns into a schoolroom where Lucy learns important life-lessons about gender roles. At the same time, the space of the gallery turns also into a laboratory-like space, a camera obscura, where Lucy ceases to be an object exposed to scrutiny and assumes the role of a scientist/subject who “examines, questions and form[s] conclusions” (V 422) about the object of her own “study” (V 224) and research. The object of her study is femininity. As already discussed, Lucy juxtaposes the narcissistic “Cleopatra” to the submissive women of the cadres, and in her narrative attempts to construct a third type of woman (Johnson 627-628). This third type of woman is the educator, who develops a scientific way of seeing, projects her mental capacity, the originality of her thoughts, her inquisitiveness, and is able to articulate centrifugal discourse and question patriarchal assumptions regarding femininity. However, these are not the only poles that Lucy studies and experiments with, but there is a whole spectrum of feminine representations, which inform her study, like the career-woman Madame
Beck, the oversentimental Pauline, the superficial and shallow Ginevra and the artist-spectacle Vashti, as is evident in the following section which discusses Lucy’s visit to the concert hall.

_The Concert and Vashti: the Camera Obscura of the Concert Hall and Theatre._ When Lucy visits the concert hall, she assumes the viewing position of the subject of the camera obscura, talking about an impartial impression of her own reflection in the mirror. It is the concert hall which takes the form of a camera obscura in which Lucy assumes a vantage point where she can both see and be seen: “we were seated in places commanding a good general view of that vast and dazzling, but warm and cheerful hall” (V 234). The experience of even wearing a pink dress is both enlightening and defamiliarizing: “A pink dress! I knew it not. It knew not me. I had not proved it” (V 231). And when she arrives at the concert hall, and sees her own reflection in a mirror, she experiences a more self-alienating and defamiliarizing experience:

We moved on—I was not at all conscious whither—but at some turn we suddenly encountered another party approaching from the opposite direction. I just now see that group, as it flashed—upon me for one moment. A handsome middle-aged lady in dark velvet; a gentleman who might be her son—the best face, the finest figure, I thought, I had ever seen; a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantle.

I noted them all—the third person as well as the other two—and for the fraction of a moment believed them all strangers, thus receiving an _impartial_ impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror, filling a
compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party. Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the ‘giftie’ of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful; it might have been worse. (V 234, my italics)

Her mode of seeing is the impartial, dispassionate, objective gaze of the subject of the camera obscura. She expresses her fear of self-exhibition and recoils from her unfamiliarly colourful image (Litvak 428), while she occupies the viewing position of the subject of the camera obscura as described by Crary: she kept “in the shade and out of sight” (V 240) observing and “examining” (V 240) the people around her. In this scientific discourse, the object of her observation and study is herself.

At the same time, she is absorbed in her observation of the social life of Villette, the people, the king and the queen of Labassecour. It is a penetrating observation that characterizes her refractive vision around her, where she can see things not seen at first glance, like the fact that the king suffers from hypochondria, while the whole royal family set a “spectacle” (V 239) before her eyes, or that Dr John is in fact displeased with Ginevra for ridiculing his mother. Her vision and epistemological quest in this social event aims at “truths—wholesome truths” (V 240), as Lucy herself says. Gradually, a whole network of gazes is revealed, where Lucy observes Dr Graham observing Ginevra who looks at him and his mother, sneers at his mother, while his mother has observed her looking at Dr John. By the end of this evening, this complex spectrum of gazes and glances allows Lucy to grow more educated in terms of the social world of Villette. As far as her own selfhood is concerned, she learns a precious lesson; although initially she was forced to wear a dress of pink colour that would place her temporarily at the centre of attention,
something that was against her character and preferences, in the end, as she herself admits: “I took off my pink dress and lace mantle with happier feelings than I had experienced in putting them on” (V 252). She is slightly changed, but also educated about her selfhood, flirting with the image of the woman as a spectacle.

After her visit to the concert hall, Lucy continues her epistemological journey through the alternative camerae obscurae of the text. Another version of the camera obscura is the theatre hall where Lucy watches a theatrical performance of a famous and celebrated actress in the role of Vashti. In the performance of Vashti, Lucy is involved in an educational process, employing scientific terminology where Vashti, the woman performer, is not gazed at passively as a spectacle but studied upon as a new planet. Lucy becomes an astronomer who explores and studies the universe of femininities:

She was a study of such nature as had not encountered my eyes yet: a great new planet she was: but in what shape? I waited her rising. She rose at nine that December night: above the horizon I saw her come. She could shine yet with pale grandeur and steady might; but that star verged already on its judgment-day. Seen near, it was a chaos—hollow, half-consumed: an orb perished or perishing—half lava, half glow. (V 286, my italics).

Lucy’s reaction to Vashti is ambiguous and almost incoherent (Johnson 624; Gilbert and Gubar 422); as Joseph Litvak points out, Lucy’s response is that of an “almost self-parodic ambivalence” (486): “It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation. It was a spectacle, low, horrible, immoral” (V 186).

As Patricia Johnson explains, there are two poles in Lucy’s reaction to Vashti: on the one hand, it is a celebration of the female Romantic artist, a heroine free to express herself (see also Gilbert and Gubar); on the other hand, she is the emblem of
Lucy’s containment within the nineteenth-century society and thus of her own self-destruction (Johnson 624). Vashti embodies the “undisciplined gender” and “uncontrollable desire” which disrupts the Victorian conceptualization of womanhood (Ciolkowski). The on-stage Vashti is rebellious and seems to lack the self-abnegation that characterizes the conventional ideal of the Victorian woman and with the fire that breaks out during the performance, the episode clearly shows that female resistance or revolt against patriarchal domination is futile (Ramli 124, 125). Lucy is deeply impressed by Vashti, both fascinated and repelled by her, since Vashti functions both as an inspiration of a liberating ideal as well as a warning against dangers hidden in the passion and desire she embodies.

Lucy’s study of models of femininity is an enlightening and educating experience; likewise, Vashti is used in order to educate her about a feminine role which both attracts and repels her. Her performance confuses Lucy because it disrupts the man/woman, human/inhuman, revelation/spectacle dichotomies and introduces a new category of neither/nor thus refusing categorization and visual placement (Levy 399). Like a scientist, Lucy studies and observes this new planet and its “cometary light,” struggling to comprehend and define herself in comparison to such a model:

For long intervals I forgot to look how [Dr John] demeaned himself, or to question what he thought. The strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit; the sunflower turned from the south to a fierce light, not solar—a rushing, red, cometary light—hot on vision and to sensation. I had

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105 Litvak claims that Lucy’s ambivalence may be the outcome of painful self-inscription of Brontë as an artist (486).

106 As Levy claims, Vashti seems to serve an unacceptable aesthetic mode because she is either “overly spectacular” or “invisibly private” (Levy 400).
seen acting before, but never anything like this: never anything which astonished Hope and hushed Desire; which outstripped Impulse and paled Conception; which, instead of merely irritating imagination with the thought of what might be done, at the same time fevering the nerves because it was not done, disclosed power like a deep, swollen winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent.

(V 287-288, my italics)

The fact that Vashti is an actress performing in public and thus exposed to public gaze is controversial as well. On the one hand, it is a revelation of the power of a woman and of her passion and uncensored imagination and, on the other hand, this woman is reduced into a spectacle, and thus becomes an object in the patriarchal scopic economy (Johnson 625). Lucy seems to sense and endorse such ambiguities, and that is why her response to Vashti is ambiguous as well.

The Vashti episode reveals also Dr John’s reflective, flat gaze which rates Vashti not as a performer but as a woman (V 289), reinforcing thus the conventional, masculine way of seeing women. His medical gaze underscores his indifference to the inner movements of female experience (Shuttleworth 238): “he judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgment” (V 289). John’s reflective, flat, superficial gaze is commented on by Lucy:

Dr. John could think and think well, but he was rather a man of action than of thought; he could feel, and feel vividly in his way, but his heart had no chord for enthusiasm: to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome, beautiful to see as dyes of rose and silver, pearl and purple, imbuing summer clouds; for what belonged to storm, what was wild
and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy, and held with it no communion. \((V 288)\)

Under Dr John’s medical gaze, the woman is reduced to flesh and the material functioning of nerves (Shuttleworth 239):

When I took time and regained inclination to glance at [Dr John], it amused and enlightened me to discover that he was watching that sinister and sovereign Vashti, not with wonder, nor worship, nor yet dismay, but simply \textit{with intense curiosity}. \((V 288, \text{my italics})\)

However, as Shuttleworth contends, in Vashti the mind is not reduced to body, but is in fact “embodied,” as Lucy observed (Shuttleworth 239):

To her, what hurts becomes immediately \textit{embodied}: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds. Scarcely a substance herself, she grapples to conflict with abstractions. Before calamity she is a tigress; she rends her woes, shivers them in convulsed abhorrence. Pain, for her, has no result in good: tears water no harvest of wisdom: on sickness, on death itself, she looks with \textit{the eye of a rebel}. \((V 287, \text{my italics})\)

Thus, Vashti reveals a true union between the worlds of mind and body: abstractions, the experiential details of mental life which physiology can not describe are given a material form (Shuttleworth 239).

In short, Vashti and Lucy’s complex and ambivalent response to her performance fuel her exploration and study of female roles. All the images of the women she encountered in the aforementioned versions of the camera obscura, that is, Cleopatra, the four women in the cadres, herself as spectacle dressed in pink and Vashti, the woman/performer who rebelliously exposes herself, are parts of her
educational quest. Lucy remains ambiguous as a subject, and does not seem to accommodate herself in any of the aforementioned models of femininity.

Her unwillingness to locate herself in an already available model of femininity resurfaces again in the last chapter of the second volume, where the question of Lucy’s identity is posed again, but this time in another context, different from the one of the chamber in the beginning of the second volume. It is not Lucy’s private, self-exploration process in an effect to construct her own subjectivity, but it is posed in a more social context; it is a question straightforwardly asked to Lucy by Ginevra, shallow but honest:

‘Who are you, Miss Snowe?’ she inquired, in a tone of such undisguised and unsophisticated curiosity, as made me laugh in my turn. ‘You used to call yourself a nursery governess; when you first came here you really had the care of the children in this house: I have seen you carry little Georgette in your arms, like a bonne—few governesses would have condescended so far—and now Madame Beck treats you with more courtesy than she treats the Parisienne, St. Pierre; and that proud chit, my cousin, makes you her bosom friend!’ ‘Wonderful!’ I agreed, much amused at her mystification. ‘Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don’t look the character.’ (V 341, my italics)

Of course Lucy cannot give an answer, instead she laughs with Ginevra’s (and our) mystification, attempting to remain elusive and “in disguise.” She remains in the dark corner of her camera obscura, not disclosing herself and her “character,” and insisting on observing and studying the objects of her own interest. Ginevra’s question is not posed in the enclosed space of the chamber; it is a question publicly voiced and openly discussed and thus it opens the space of Lucy’s self construction and self-
education. Ginevra’s curiosity drags Lucy to the centre of the attention of the narrative since now Lucy becomes the object of another woman’s curiosity. She herself becomes a version of femininity that offers material for study to another woman. Ginevra continues voicing her mystification about Lucy:

… ‘But are you anybody?’ persevered she, pushing her hand, in spite of me, under my arm; and that arm pressed itself with inhospitable closeness against my side, by way of keeping out the intruder. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I am a rising character: once an old lady's companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school-teacher.’ (V 342, my italics)

Lucy answers the question but in fact she does not give any clue regarding as to “who she really is”; she simply repeats things we already know. However, her statement is significant because it shows the way she wants to be viewed and considered by other people: she wants to be defined as a “rising character,” in accordance with the ideal of the self-made man of her times (a model also used in The Professor) and as a proper heroine of a Bildungsroman. What characterises her is her social progress in life which is based on independent means. Her progress is described in terms of education mainly, since the final stage she reaches is that of a school teacher.

Immediately after this discussion, however, and the voicing of her association of self-definition with social progress, Lucy undermines her own words and shares with her reader what she really thinks of social position in a discussion where the image of the mind resurfaces:

As for me, it quite sufficed to my mental tranquillity that I was known where it imported that known I should be; the rest sat on me easily: pedigree, social position, and recondite intellectual acquisition, occupied about the same space and place in my interests and thoughts; they were my third-class lodgers—to
whom could be assigned only the small sitting-room and the little back bedroom: even if the dining and drawing-rooms stood empty, I never confessed it to them, as thinking minor accommodations better suited to their circumstances. *The world, I soon learned, held a different estimate:* and I make no doubt, *the world is very right in its view, yet believe also that I am not quite wrong in mine.* (*V* 343, my italics).

In Lucy’s words, as Rachel Malane contends, Brontë gives her vision of the brain: it is defined as an area having “space and place” where the brain’s contents are seen as tenants, or “lodgers” or various “rooms” (Malane 75). Drawing again on Lockean representations of the mind, Lucy closes the second volume of her narration with the same representation of the mind as the one with which she opened it, that is, the mind as an enclosed space, a chamber with furniture and tenants.

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107 Rachel Malane in her study of Brontë treatment of the mind, claims that it is viewed as a space/container (79). She claims that Brontë poses questions on the material aspect of the brain and explores the ways that this space may be altered or changed according to the environmental influence (79). Brontë shows (through her extensive use of phrenology) that some functions of the brain may be innate but at the same time she shows that some of the mental elements develop over time in the context of one’s surroundings in the sense that the mental environment that other people provide may influence the ability to understand the world, to interpret events and people (Malane 79). Having established the strong influence of the environment on the brain, Brontë shows how culture reinforces the gendered mind through separate childhood environments for boys and girls, and describes the education of the mind in institutional systems which design environments for instructing children in proper gender behaviour (Malane 80). Both *Villette* and *Jane Eyre* show gendered realms of knowledge and mental capacity; for example, M Paul articulates the conviction that certain realms of knowledge are more suited to one gender (Malane 82). Although Lucy states her intention to remain in her allotted female realm of knowledge, she also shows her desire to break free from these restrictive boundaries, a disposition expressed in her characterization of M Paul as “the Great Empreror”, as Malane contends (83). Jane Eyre likewise, expresses her desire to break down mental boundaries in her wish to gain access in the deepest thoughts of cultivated minds of both genders (Malane 83). In addition, Jane’s penetrating mind and confident cleverness appears to be highly arousing to Rochester and Brontë shows through the case of Rochester and Jane that when two minds are in love, they become assimilated and in exposing thoughts they loosen the self-defensive protection of their mental realms to attain greater intimacy (Malane 84, 89). Another example of two gendered minds that come together is the case of Dr John and Paulina in *Villette* (Malane 90), who seem to be mentally “compatible.”
4. CONCLUSION

The narrative of Lucy’s life in Villette and her quest for knowledge is underscored by the recurrent image of the brain and mental activity. Through a series of camerae obscurae which take the textual form of the chamber, the schoolroom, the picture gallery, the concert hall and the theatre, she constructs her own subject of these camerae obscurae. And it is her profession as an educator, as a rising character who becomes a governess and then an English teacher, which allows reflections of the social world outside her own chamber/mind to enter from the little aperture inside her own camera obscura and be subject to her scrutiny and study. This enables Lucy to have a more creative, dialogic relationship with her social environment. The dialogic nature of her way of looking emerges through a broader educational and self-educational process. She talks about the mind as a room, the thoughts as tenants but also about the dialogic relationship between the subject who thinks and its social environment. In this context, Lucy realizes that she may not be “quite wrong in her views,” but also that the world can have a “different estimate” and can be “very right in its views” (V 343) as well. She realizes that different perspectives and different points of view can be available and equally valid, and includes subjective vision as well in her epistemological narrative. Lucy trusts the objective, penetrating, interpretative eye of the camera obscura in her search for truth, but gradually she also realizes that seeing and understanding is a matter of deeply personal and subjective perception as well. This is something more clearly defined and explored in the last volume of the novel.
Chapter Six
The Collapse of the Camera Obscura: A Knowledge of Lucy’s Own

1. M Paul’s Mental Library

As we have already seen, Lucy employs scientific discourse to talk about her own education, her intellectual pursuits and mental abilities. In the beginning of the third volume, Lucy resorts to a discussion of her own educational and epistemological interests as they are informed through her relationship with her teacher and colleague, M Paul. Now, as Lucy has started to open up her vision and her interaction with other people, the formation of her own epistemological tools becomes more mature and she appears determined to give a more precise definition of what knowledge is for her.

One of the major factors in her education is M Paul, who is described as “Bonaparte” in his class. In discussing M Paul’s attitude towards studious Lucy, Brontë employs a metaphor which reminds us of Locke’s and Newton’s camera obscura. In this chamber/mind the eyes of the face are the windows:

He watched tearlessly—ordeal that he exacted should be passed through—fearlessly. He followed footprints that, as they approached the bourne, were sometimes marked in blood—followed them grimly, holding the austerest police-watch over the pain-pressed pilgrim. And when at last he allowed a rest, before slumber might close the eyelids, he opened those same lids wide, with pitiless finger and thumb, and gazed deep through the pupil and the irids into the brain, into the heart, to search if Vanity, or Pride, or Falsehood, in any of its subtlest forms, was discoverable in the furthest recess of existence.
If, at last, he let the neophyte sleep, it was but a moment; he woke him suddenly up to apply new tests: he sent him on irksome errands when he was staggering with weariness; he tried the temper, the sense, and the health; and it was only when every severest test had been applied and endured, when the most corrosive aquafortis had been used, and failed to tarnish the ore, that he admitted it genuine, and, still in clouded silence, stamped it with his deep brand of approval. (V 388-389, my italics)

The emphasis on interiority of the pupil’s (Lucy’s) selfhood in this image is striking; M Paul holds open the lids of the eye and he sees through the “irids” inside the mind, the heart of the subject/object of his study and looks for the ideas of Vanity, Pride, and Falsehood which are objectified, as items that can be somehow located inside the enclosed space of the mind. In this context, M Paul assumes the position of a scientist, or ophthalmologist as Inglis puts it (Opthalmoscopy 349), who sits in proximity to his patient/pupil and looks straight into his eye to examine it (Opthalmoscopy 360). It is an explicit example of the penetrating attitude towards knowledge so often attributed to the man-knower in Villette. Mental capacity is conceptualised as a substance that can be “stamped … [in a] deep brand of approval” (V 389), that can undergo chemical processing with the “most corrosive aquafortis.”

This scientific discourse which draws on chemistry and Lockean metaphors is employed by Brontë to initiate the reader into a discussion of the educational context of her time, in which Lucy unwraps her ideas regarding her own experience and self-evaluation as a student, as well as more general ideas about the education of women and men.

108 It is also indicative of Brontë’s knowledge of chemistry terminology and her ability to employ such terms in her discussion. The same happens with her following phrase “the light changed in his eyes from a beam to a spark” (V 390).
Lucy looks up to M Paul and becomes his student in a subject which was considered not so appropriate for women at that time: arithmetic. However, Lucy undermines her own capacity to understand, by claiming that she has a “preternatural imbecility”:

The beginning of all effort has indeed with me been marked by a *preternatural imbecility*. I never could, even in forming a common acquaintance, assert or prove a claim to average quickness. A depressing and difficult passage has prefaced every new page I have turned in life. (*V* 389)

Lucy describes herself in a strikingly strict way as a particularly slow student, who patiently and painstakingly struggles to acquire knowledge. Her lack of “average quickness” seems to expand in other fields of her life, like personal relationships. However, this self-portrait is in sharp contrast with her self-portrait in a previous passage:

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

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109 In the context of the gendered conceptualisation of knowledge which was quite widespread during the first half of the nineteenth century, few women would learn maths and move beyond decimals and fractions, according to Thorndählen (92). Writers on the education of women faced a complex problem because, on the one hand, there was a widespread notion that the female brain could not cope with arithmetics and, on the other hand, it was a fact that maths was unpopular among girls themselves (Thorndählen 92). Generally, writers on education considered mathematics as especially beneficial for girls, as a means to gaining mental power and acumen and in the early nineteenth century, governesses and schoolteachers tried to convince parents so as to encourage their girls to study arithmetic by employing various arguments like that they would not be cheated by tradesmen, they would be able to keep their own books and manage their own household accounts in good order (Thorndählen 92, 93). This is the case with physical sciences as well. There was some disagreement as to whether it was a proper subject for girls, and there are not many references to physical sciences in the Brontë novels since the Brontës themselves did not show much interest in them; they did not seem to favour physics and chemistry since they found them probably less absorbing than other subjects (Thorndählen 94, 95). As I have already mentioned, Charlotte Brontë herself wrote to Ellen Nussey that she considered “Algebra and Optics” as amusing subjects to some people, however she termed them as “problematic wisdom,” and she placed them in the antipode of “well-chosen general reading” that can “enlarge” a woman’s “views” (*Shorter* 314).
in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature. (V 120)

It is “the quick of her nature,” the passion that lurks beneath the surface of her reservation and her narrative, that she attempts to efface by talking about average quickness. Does she tease the reader? Is this “imbecility” a façade that she needs in order to cope with the (hostile) educational context of her time? As an answer to these questions, Lucy describes the rivalry in her educational relationship with M Paul:

So long as this passage lasted, M. Paul was very kind, very good, very forbearing … But, strange grief! when that heavy and overcast dawn began at last to yield to day; when my faculties began to struggle themselves, free, and my time of energy and fulfilment came; when I voluntarily doubled, trebled, quadrupled the tasks he set, to please him as I thought, his kindness became sternness; the light changed in his eyes from a beam to a spark; he fretted, he opposed, he curbed me imperiously; the more I did, the harder I worked, the less he seemed content. (V 389)

As long as his female student appears “imbecile” and ignorant, he is supportive and helpful, but when she appears to make progress and acquire knowledge, the balance between the empowered male knower and the ignorant female student is disturbed. M Paul poses mostly emotional hindrances to his pupil and thus the centripetal forces of his discourse constantly clash with the centrifugal force of the female knower who struggles to construct her own epistemological discourse.

The clash between the male educator’s and the female pupil’s discourses is further supported by an argumentation that derives from the social and educational context of their times and is voiced textually. It is Lucy who initially seems to endorse the limits of her sex in knowledge, and who believes in a type of “unfeminine
knowledge.” Lucy as a woman is strictly allotted to a particular, “feminine knowledge” policed by a male knower/educator. However, she voices her attempt to undermine the masculine epistemological supervision which urges her to become a ‘trespasser’ on the realms of ‘masculine’ knowledge:

I was vaguely threatened with I know not what doom, if I ever trespassed the limits proper to my sex, and conceived a contraband appetite for unfeminine knowledge. 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. (V 390, my italics)

M Paul supports the centripetal division of gendered knowledge and although Lucy states her intention to remain within the ‘proper’ regions of mental exploration, she also reveals a desire to break those strictures and free herself from a man whom she calls “the Great Emperor” (Malane 83). She experiences the “thirst” for “science in the abstract,” as well as the “godlike thirst after discovery,” thus turning herself into an enquiring mind, a female scientist thirsting for discovery, who transgresses gendered epistemological boundaries and is led by “ambitious wishes,” “aspiration[s],” and “stimuli.” Thus, Lucy gives the reader a clearer idea of the epistemological subject she has constructed so far; she is an ambiguous subject, in the

110 Joseph Boone, however, argues that M Paul is goading Lucy’s “ambitious wishes” for intellectual advancement: under the guise of “impatience and irascibility” he seeks to stimulate Lucy into the active realization of her own powers (Boone 34). Even if this is his aim, I think that we should not ignore the clash between his perspective and Lucy’s, since it gives Lucy the alibi to explore and voice her own quest and queries regarding her intellectual ambitions.
figure of whom both the “preternatural imbecile” female knower who endorses the
established patriarchal centripetal preconceptions regarding gendered knowledge, and
an alternative female scientist who is ambitious and thirsty to conquer new realms of
knowledge, merge. This ambiguous subject, who owns powers which are either
“feminine or the contrary,” emerges with resolution in Lucy’s self-definition:

Whatever my powers—feminine or the contrary—God had given them, and I
felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of His bestowal. (V 390)

M Paul accuses Lucy of pretending ignorance and of knowing more things than she
appears to know. So, Lucy seems to trick her readers; is she or is she not really more
learned than other people think? The answer to this question is Lucy’s decisive
contention that originality is what characterizes her knowledge: she likes to “think
[her] own thoughts” (V 261) and to read books which are distinguished for the
originality of their writer’s “style or sentiment,” books on which the “writer’s
individual nature was plainly stamped.”

M Paul’s discourse degrades women as he associates women’s mental
capacity and intellectual potential with that of a monkey:

In M. Emanuel's soul rankled a chronic suspicion that I knew both Greek and
Latin. As monkeys are said to have the power of speech if they would but use
it, and are reported to conceal this faculty in fear of its being turned to their
detriment, so to me was ascribed a fund of knowledge which I was supposed
criminally and craftily to conceal. (V 392, my italics)

Lucy’s answer refers to the importance of women’s education, and she does not seem
to endorse the idea that issues of cleverness, intellectual aptitude and intelligence are
in fact matters of innateness. She rebels against the patriarchal prejudice that women’s
mental capacity is inferior to men’s:
Oh! why did nobody undertake to make me clever while I was young enough to learn, that I might, by one grand, sudden, inhuman revelation—one cold, cruel, overwhelming triumph—have for ever crushed the mocking spirit out of Paul Carl David Emanuel! (V 393, my italics)

Lucy’s argument echoes Mary Wollstonecraft’s main argument that men and women are of equal mental capabilities and that a relative lack of women’s intellectual achievement is the result of educational systems\(^{111}\) (qtd in Malane ix):

One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men, who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than rational wives; and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect. (Wollstonecraft, Introduction)

So, education is the major field within which the emancipation of women can take place; education is projected as a means to satisfying a woman’s deep desire to know, her curiosity and her need to “exercise” her “faculties, and a field for [her] efforts,” which is as deep and urgent as men’s (JE 109). In addition, Charlotte Brontë views

\(^{111}\) The same idea is reproduced in *Jane Eyre* in chapter XII:

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity; they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (JE 109)
education as an outlet for a woman, since in her novels, education leads to a change in marital status and social position and therefore it is a means that could raise a woman to another social position (Van Der Meer 27). At the same time, education is one of the first (if not the first) professional fields, where a woman could attempt to build a career of her own, either as a governess, a teacher or headmistress. In addition, Brontë repeatedly referred to the issue of female education as a liberating force, supportive of female emancipation. Education is also Brontë’s counterargument to centripetal, patriarchal assumptions that support the idea of hereditary-inherent female inferiority.

However, M Paul voices the centripetal patriarchal discourse since he overtly condemns “women of intellect” as “monstrous creatures,” unnatural, useless, insufficient in their roles either as wives or workers and praises what he calls “passive feminine mediocrity.” His argumentation aims at suppressing any intellectual ambition on part of Lucy, and serves an overt patriarchal ideology:

‘Women of intellect’ was his next theme: here he was at home. A ‘woman of intellect,’ it appeared, was a sort of ‘lusus naturae,’ a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife nor worker. Beauty anticipated her in the first office. He believed in his soul that lovely, placid, and passive feminine mediocrity was the only pillow on which manly thought and sense could find rest for its aching temples; and as to work, male mind alone could work to any good practical result. (V 393)

Lucy’s response to such claims is not that of overt rebellion but rather her determination to form an epistemological agent for her own quest of knowledge and

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312 As a matter of fact, although in the early nineteenth century the majority of “teachers of infants” were male, by the 1870s the numbers of men and women teachers in elementary schools were roughly equal and by early twentieth-century women composed almost the 70 per cent of the teaching force (Steedman 11).
intellectual pursuits. But what is the result of the pursuits of such an epistemological agent? What knowledge does she think she acquires? As Lucy explains:

While eating his cake, I could not forbear expressing my secret wish that I really knew all of which he accused me. "Did I sincerely feel myself to be an ignoramus?" he asked, in a softened tone. If I had replied meekly by an unqualified affirmative, I believe he would have stretched out his hand, and we should have been friends on the spot, but I answered—"Not exactly. I am ignorant, Monsieur, in the knowledge you ascribe to me, but I sometimes, not always, feel a knowledge of my own." "What did I mean?" he inquired, sharply. Unable to answer this question in a breath, I evaded it by change of subject. (V 393-394, my italics)

In this deeply personal confession, Lucy claims right to a “knowledge of [her] own”, a unique, original knowledge. M Paul seems to endorse the centripetal forces of the dichotomy between feminine knowledge and the condemnation of the “literate woman.” But, underneath this discussion lurks Lucy’s centrifugal force to define the nature of the result of her epistemological quest. In her ambition to acquire “a knowledge of [her] own” (V 394), Lucy’s knowledge is defined in terms of originality; Lucy asserts her independence regarding her knowledge, and her epistemological agency. In her words, woman is presented as an original, independent epistemological agent/subject in spite of all ambiguous environment. She has difficulty in explaining by means of examples what she really means by “her own knowledge,” and this is why, when asked to clarify, she remains silent. It is not a kind of feminine knowledge which is traditionally defined as “occult” or supernatural, as Lydon holds (Lydon 24), but rather a more profound but unidentified kind of knowledge which still remains elusive and difficult to invest verbally. Lucy almost
intuitively and “preternaturally” knows that it exists and continues her effort in the rest of the novel to define and attain it somehow.

In the last volume of the novel, the enclosed spaces where Lucy has so far constructed her knowledge, that is her own camerae obscurae, gradually collapse. She gradually abandons the site of the disembodied eye dispassionately observing reality around her, and instead appears more mature to interact with her environment. This is more clearly expressed in her representation of the mind as a library:

I have said, that, for myself, I had no impromptu faculty; and perhaps that very deficiency made me marvel the more at one who possessed it in perfection. M. Emanuel was not a man to write books; but I have heard him lavish, with careless, unconscious prodigality, such mental wealth as books seldom boast; *his mind was indeed my library, and whenever it was opened to me, I entered bliss.* Intellectually imperfect as I was, I could read little; there were few bound and printed volumes that did not weary me—whose perusal did not fag and blind—but his tomes of thought were collyrium to the spirit's eyes; over their contents, inward sight grew clear and strong. I used to think what a delight it would be for one who loved him better than he loved himself, to gather and store up those handfuls of gold-dust, so recklessly flung to heaven's reckless winds. (*V* 422, my italics)

Lucy’s new image of the mind embodies a more mature conceptualization of it, which encompasses dialogue and interaction with other minds, especially that of M Paul. The mind is still represented in Lockean terms as a chamber, as a “library,” but this time Lucy does not assume the position of its subject, hidden in the dark and dispassionately observing. Instead, in an insightfully occularcentric discourse Lucy describes how her “spirit’s eyes” and “inward sight” grew clear and strong with the
help of the “collyrium” of M Paul’s thoughts, that is, through the interaction and
dialogue with M Paul. In this passage as Malane contends, Lucy describes her
euphoria of an open sharing of minds with M Paul (92).\textsuperscript{113} And as Joseph Boone
notes, in this passage, it is now M Paul who is open to Lucy, it is he who is textually
represented as a “static threshold”; in this passage there is “an imagistic reversal”
which transforms Lucy into the penetrator of M. Paul (Boone 34).\textsuperscript{114}

The original thoughts of a woman, whose real ability is skillfully hidden from
the public eyes, is something sought for by Lucy throughout the novel. She does not
really care if a woman has got exquisite mental abilities or an exceptional intellectual
potential; what really matters is original thought, the determination of a woman to
“think her own thoughts” and to have “a knowledge of her own,” and this is both a
matter of innate abilities and the result of her epistemological quest, and the
interaction with an intellectually stimulating environment. She claims for women the
right to original thinking, without in fact excluding women on the basis of their lack
of elitist innate abilities. The image of the camera obscura she has constructed for
herself in the first two volumes is gradually replaced by a more mature image: a
subject who constructs her own knowledge by interacting with learned people. In the
third volume of the novel, the image of the camera obscura gradually collapses and
this is reflected in the emergence of the open fields of the park and the open fields in
front of Lucy’s new school that offer her a new environment and a saving solution.

\textsuperscript{113} However, she also refers to the negative aspects of the merging of gendered brains; she spots some
inequality between herself and M Paul (Malane 94).

\textsuperscript{114} It is the intellectual reciprocity that ultimately differentiates Lucy’s relationship with M Paul from
that with Dr John (Boone 34). On the whole, Boone contends that the aforementioned imagistic
reversal, when Lucy becomes a penetrator, is not simply a matter of usurpation of the “male” position;
it is part of the unsettling of assumed categories and oppositions which contribute to the diffusion
of power into multiple “conduits in the Foucaultian schema” of power relations that is used also to break
the whole system down (35).
2. THE FETE IN THE PARK

As soon as Lucy finds herself under the influence of the opiate sedative that Madame Beck has given her, she stealthily runs away and finds herself in the middle of a fete, a carnival festival in the park of Villette. She sees the group of her friends, her godmother, Dr Graham, Pauline and others, but she does not approach them. Although they are in the open air, she attempts to construct for herself a camera obscura by accommodating herself in the dark shadows of such a place, where she can dispassionately observe what is going on around her. This is evident in Lucy’s discourse when she says that she follows her friends “viewlessly” (V 500); she sees them but they don’t see her and she feels “safe as if masked” (V 501). She is a “distant gazer” (V 502), again in the shadow and alone, driven by a “spirit of restlessness and adventure” (V 505), eager to place under her own control what she sees “on close inspection” (V 506).

However, such an endeavour does not prove feasible, since she loses control over her viewing and observing positions because now she has to move constantly: “to stand still was not [her] power, not quietly to observe” (V 501). There is such a big crowd around her that she is forced to move, “staying at random, obeying the push of every chance elbow” (V 506), “follow[ing] the ebb” (V 517). Consequently, she is forced to move to a second place in this carnival scene concealed again and situated in “an obscure, safe seat” (V 509), and observe M Beck and her “junta.” She is not a free

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115 Joseph Boone reads in this scene, Lucy’s quest for her own sexuality; she decides to seek a stone basin in the park and thus participates in her own imaginative erotic quest, searching out for her own sexuality (37). In that basin, which is a “circular mirror” standing for her own sexuality, Lucy will see her own reflection as well as the reflected moon which Boone holds is often associated with female sexuality in Charlotte Brontë’s novels (Boone 37).
floating inhabitant of a dark room, observing dispassionately what goes on around her; instead she is immersed in the fete and the festive atmosphere around her.

What is crucial at this point of the novel is that the camera obscura model is abandoned, since the distinction between inside and outside world, which is so crucial and a prerequisite in the camera obscura model (Crary 68), is cancelled. As Sally Shuttleworth explains, Lucy’s famous opiate-induced wanderings dissolve the divisions between the inner and outer realms (241). The distinction between imagination and “truth”/reality is quite blurred,\textsuperscript{116} letting a subjective vision and unreliable perception emerge. Lucy ‘sees’ a variety of lights in various hues and colours, describing thus a highly personal experience of light, since those lights do not exist in the outside real world but are produced in her eyes and body. This is an example of subjective vision in Goethean terms, which is conditioned by the body and its reactions and not any ‘objective’ external reality:

In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest architectural wealth—of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphinx: incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed throughout the park of Villette. (V’500)

In this framework of subjective experience of vision, Lucy describes an experience of light which is in accordance with what became quite known in the beginning of the nineteenth century, that is, an observer’s experience of light is not necessarily connected with actual life: chemical agents, narcotics, etc., when absorbed in blood,

\textsuperscript{116}This long climactic episode might almost be read as a symbolic encounter between the Bakhtinian carnival and the Foucaultian prison, an encounter in which the two spaces, like the theatre and the schoolroom, clash and merge and displace each other, in what becomes a vertiginous dialectic of “Imagination” and “Truth” (Litvak 488).
give rise to the appearance of luminous sparks independently of any external cause (Crary 90-91). This is what Lucy describes in the aforementioned passage, where she describes her experience immediately after drinking M Beck’s narcotic.

In such a setting, which blurs the distinction between inner and outer world and subjective perception is gradually foregrounded, Lucy reveals the goal of her epistemological quest, which is nothing else than the “real truth,” a traditional goal of epistemology and science. She qualifies her search for truth in masculine terms, since the verb that she employs is “to penetrate,” a quite aggressive and masculine attitude towards the revelation of truth. But she also resorts to a narrative of imagination, in which she envisions Truth as a goddess in her Temple, a “Titaness” to be worshipped. Lucy invests her conceptualization of Truth with an alternative, feminine narrative of fantasy and she declares that she is not afraid to “see and to know” even the worst aspects of reality:

_I always, through my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth_; I like seeking the goddess in her temple, and handling the veil, and daring the dread glance. O Titaness among deities! the covered outline of thine aspect sickens often through its uncertainty, but define to us one trait, show us one lineament, clear in awful sincerity; we may gasp in untold terror, but with that gasp we drink in a breath of thy divinity; our heart shakes, and its currents sway like rivers lifted by earthquake, but we have swallowed strength. _To see and know the worst_ is to take from Fear her main advantage. (_V_ 514, my italics)

In the park scene, Lucy, drugged and alone, repeatedly calls upon the reader to share her perception of what she terms as the “Truth” (Silver 110). Employing words as “we” and “us” in her appeals, she identifies her readers completely with her own perspective (Silver 110). So, the goal of her epistemological quest is not the utopia of
an ‘objective’ truth but objectivity hued with the colours of a subjective perception of what is truth. In numerous occasions in her narrative, Lucy is our own prism; as Elizabeth Haller explains, Lucy allows us to see what she chooses for us to see, not only in other characters, like Graham, but also in herself (155). So, the reader has immediate access to her own perception of truth. The result of Lucy’s commitment to the epistemological quest of “Truth” is her freedom:

In my infatuation, I said, "Truth, you are a good mistress to your faithful servants! While a Lie pressed me, how I suffered! Even when the Falsehood was still sweet, still flattering to the fancy, and warm to the feelings, it wasted me with hourly torment. The persuasion that affection was won could not be divorced from the dread that, by another turn of the wheel, it might be lost. Truth stripped away Falsehood, and Flattery, and Expectancy, and here I stand—free!" (V 516, my italics)

At this point, a little before the end of the narrative, Lucy succeeds as a scientist, finds the truth and declares her freedom, which is versatile and multifaceted. First of all, it is her freedom from superstition and the traditional conceptualization of feminine knowledge as ‘occult,’ and this happens when Lucy realizes that the nun does not really exist but it is de Hamal who wears a nun’s clothes so as to enter the school undisturbed, to see his beloved Ginevra. Then, it is a woman’s freedom to build a career, to support herself in life through her own means: Lucy runs a schoolhouse in the end. And last, it is the freedom to deny the norms: marriage, or living and working

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Brown, who focuses on the figure of the governess as emblematic in the urban setting of Villette and as a symbol of melancholy, sees the fete scene as a scene of liberation. Brown contends that it is the crowd which is the fountain that Lucy has sought for; in a crowd so glad and mobile, the governess is as free as any other person in Villette, and experiences the city as a place of recognition and discovery (Brown 378-379).
in the shadow of a successful man. In the end, it is the freedom to choose for herself a
narrative that resists closure.

3. THE NUN

The symbolic act of the revelation of truth comes immediately after Lucy’s interaction
with a lot of people, the “illuminations” and the music in the open space of the fete
and not inside the walls of a camera obscura:

Tempered by late incidents, my nerves disdained hysteria. Warm from
illuminations, and music, and thronging thousands, thoroughly lashed up by a
new scourge, I defied spectra. In a moment, without exclamation, I had rushed
on the haunted couch; nothing leaped out, or sprung, or stirred; all the
movement was mine, so was all the life, the reality, the substance, the force; as
my instinct felt. 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. (V 519, my italics)

In this setting, Lucy celebrates the female scientist who defies superstition, tears down
the “incubus,” the “goblin,” and superstition and fear become all “shreds and
fragments.” The textual embodiment of her own perception of “truth,” as well as the
triump of her epistemological quest for knowledge is the disclosure of the real nature
of the nun, which provides a reasonable explanation for its mystery. The figure of the
nun is one of the most powerful and emblematic figures in Villette, and critics have
provided many varied and insightful interpretations of its function in the novel.

According to Shuttleworth, Lucy’s sightings of the nun occur significantly at
moments of heightened sexual tension, and the ghostly pursuit of the nun seems to
embody externally Lucy’s self-repression (226). The nun appears in moments when Lucy seems ready to find happiness beyond the walls of her confinement, especially with Dr John (Wein 736). Lucy can free herself from her obsession with Dr John by burying her letters in the garden where the tomb of the nun is said to be located (Wein 737). Thus the nun, the novel’s most Gothic “character,” “enacts a maneuver by which internal matter is moved outside, the unseen into the realm of the visual” (Heady 350). Lucy’s encounter with the nun, where she finds the doll in her own bed and tears it to bits, can be interpreted as a “symbolic gesture” through which Lucy exchanges her Gothic sensibilities for more realist pursuits and, in this way, the “Victorian novel found its direction and its justification” (V. Colby 26 qtd in Heady 350). By tearing down the empty clothes of the nun, Lucy Snowe becomes the heroine of the “new” realistic novel and clears her mind of the phantoms of the past and thus exorcises the Gothic novel (R. Colby 419)\textsuperscript{118}.

The nun may also represent a third gendered subjectivity, like the crossdresser (as Lucy is dressed as a man during her performance), which however thwarted, calls attention to and disrupts oppositions between male/female and visibility/invisibility (Levy 408). She represents a figure between seeing and being seen, who appears at narrative moments when Lucy’s own ability to see is reduced (Levy 408). The nun introduces new modes of perception; on the one hand, her sightings call into question Lucy’s sanity and the reality of her world; on the other hand, in dissolving the material solidity and localization of space, the nun introduces time and movement and therefore, the possibility of an exit (Brown 377).

\textsuperscript{118} Seen from a different perspective, Lucy’s attack on the nun does not signal a rewriting of the Gothic into realism, but rather demonstrates how “Lucy is divided against herself” (Jacobus qtd in Heady 350). For Kate Brown, the nun is the emblem of a loss which remains both present and absent, unforgettable and yet unremembered (Brown 376). The nun articulates and breaks down divisions between spaces that had seemed opposed, including this world and the next, past and present, centre and margin, the governesses pensionnat and the flaneur’s boulevards (Brown 377).
The nun and the revelation that in fact she is a non-entity, that is, she does not really exist though there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for her appearances, enables Lucy to establish her epistemological agency on solid ground: she defies superstition, and “occult” feminine knowledge, and validates the reliability of her epistemology, since it leads to a rational/truthful perception of reality. The epistemological agent she has constructed so far moves from the enclosed spaces of the camera obscura and its ‘objective’ vision, to open fields of less inhibited interaction with other people and a more ‘subjective’ vision, which however does not coincide with illusion, superstition and irrationality, but rather underlines a rational, self-assertive female epistemological agent.

4. Lucy’s Schoolhouse

Lucy’s schoolhouse which M Paul bequeaths her, constructs the intersection, the new space in which Lucy’s epistemology is brought into action. This new schoolhouse is both a private but also a public space. It is at the same time both enclosed, as a “nutshell” (V 535), and full of prospects, with a view to the open fields both literally and metaphorically, warranting Lucy’s prospects for a career and an independent life. It is the realization of her dream to have her own school and be a schoolmistress though she modestly states that she is a “steward of M Paul’s property” (V 543).

It is the space which appropriately accommodates the governess/teacher, and her ambiguous and idiosyncratic social position, which is both private and public. The

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319 In the final rendezvous between Lucy and M Paul, the description of the room, the balcony and the nature show that nature can be both spacious and sublime (R. Colby 414); this meeting reconciles nature and art, as well as life and literature (R. Colby 414).
schoolhouse best symbolizes the existential realm that Lucy comes to occupy. It is the place which she names as her true and most happy home, and most of all it is a space which cancels the very language of “in” and “out” upon which the power of male dominated disciplinary order depends (Boone 41). In the same wavelength, the one space in Villette, which definitely mediates between domestic and public culture, and links the private woman with its public figure, is the schoolroom (Levy 408).  

Although the schoolroom in Villette is the “uninscribed conclusion to the novel, not its scene of action” (Steedman 7), it is important because it rounds off her journey through life and her experimentation. The schoolhouse symbolizes her oscillation between the public and the private, the objective and the subjective, “truth” and “illusion”, passivity and activity and the whole range of issues which are explored in the novel. In this space, Lucy finds out new things about herself. In her discussion with M Paul, she confesses her feelings of jealousy for her rival (as she mistakenly thought), Justine Marie, and also a dark side of her own personality that she was not aware of:  

Warm, jealous, and haughty, I knew not till now that my nature had such a mood: he gathered me near his heart. I was full of faults; he took them and me all home. For the moment of utmost mutiny, he reserved the one deep spell of peace. (V 541, my italics)

In this schoolhouse, Lucy at last makes a decisive step towards the revelation of herself. Her camera obscura collapses together with her defense, since she “does not lack words now,” and speaks truthfully and without hesitation to M Paul:

120 Badowska, however, reads this schoolhouse in a different light; she describes it as a “travesty of the home [Lucy] wished for: a perfect little schoolroom that meshes the private with the professional, almost parodic in the way it copies M Beck’s pensionnat in miniature form” (1519).
I spoke. All escaped from my lips. I lacked not words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale; it streamed on my tongue. I went back to the night in the park; I mentioned the medicated draught—why it was given—its goading effect—how it had torn rest from under my head, shaken me from my couch, carried me abroad with the lure of a vivid yet solemn fancy—a summer-night solitude on turf, under trees, near a deep, cool lakelet. I told the scene realized; the crowd, the masques, the music, the lamps, the splendours, the guns booming afar, the bells sounding on high. All I had encountered I detailed, all I had recognised, heard, and seen; how I had beheld and watched himself: how I listened, how much heard, what conjectured; the whole history, in brief, summoned to his confidence, rushed thither, truthful, literal, ardent, bitter. (V 540-541)

Even though the reader is provided with a summary of what she tells to M Paul, and not the whole confession, Lucy becomes visible. Together with her freedom and prospect of self-emancipation, Lucy finds also the freedom of self-expression as she pours out her feelings and thoughts. The schoolhouse provides Lucy with a space for self-education and personal evolution. It both consolidates and cancels the enclosed space of the camera obscura, constructing thus a fitting lab for experimentation for the female scientist.

5. AN AMBIGUOUS ENDING

The ambiguous ending of *Villette*, has provided ample space for discussion and has been interpreted in various ways by critics. As soon as Paul leaves, Lucy finds in her correspondence with him all the necessary emotional sustenance during her years of
female autonomy which are lonely as well as satisfying (Parkin-Gounelas, *Selfhood* 104). Brown holds that Brontë with this end refuses to consider marriage as a means by which the world can be renewed, and instead perpetuates mourning and loss (380). For Robert Colby, it is an ending which signals Lucy’s reconciliation with real life, her acceptance and understanding of things as they are; there is no “and they lived happily ever after” ending, instead separation and sorrow which must be endured in this life (419).

Shanyn Fiske suggests that it is ultimately the journey that matters and the hope of home must suspend between desire and destination (19). As Karen Chase contends, it is M Paul’s presence that enables the love plot to continue and it is his absence that allows the plot of ambition to thrive—Lucy succeeds as a headmistress and writer in the spaces provided by M. Paul’s absence (qtd in Lawrence 465). Paradoxically, Lucy is nourished by his absence and by his letters and it is the distance between them that allows her writing to flourish (Lawrence 465-466). Hughes claims that *Villette*’s ending defines a state of inescapable suspense in which Lucy oscillates between disaster and hope (715). For Lucie Armit, the ambiguous ending and M Paul’s obscure fate is analogous to the obscure childhood that Lucy had (Armitt 227). It is clear, however, that Lucy has gained the power to grow and to speak, and with it the power to endure (Silver 111). Joseph Boone contends that Lucy constructs a resolutely independent female subject whose mental and autoerotic health—as opposed to her depressive anxieties—depends in the end, on her refusal to be pinned down, either by possessive men or by preying readers (39).

121 Also, Caren Chase holds that the end of the relationship between Lucy and M Paul is inevitable since it is predominantly a relationship between master and pupil, and as such it is condemned to end when the pupil has gained maturity and autonomy and thus education has reached its end (84). Thus, the success of this relation leads to its undoing, because sustaining the master/pupil hierarchy would result in frustrating Lucy’s will to maturity (Chase 84).
Frustration is the key-word for this ambiguous ending: the unmentioned death of Paul Emmanuel is one of the numerous frustrations in the narrative and Lucy finally does not reveal herself to the well-trained reader but remains enigmatic, beyond complete explanation (Dames 388). *Villette’s* ambiguous ending is a well-suited ending for an ambiguous and elusive subject like Lucy. Her narrative has been her experimentation in various fields, and her effort to construct her epistemological agency traces a progress.\(^{122}\) We see that Lucy attempts to construct her knowledge, at least in the beginning of her narrative on the basis of the camera obscura model. Towards the end of her narrative, though, she gradually abandons her position as a self-restrained subject who observes the world around her and does not participate in it. Instead she develops a more mature and dialectical relationship with her environment, communicates with other people, mostly M Paul. As Longino explains, knowledge is an outcome of the critical dialogue in which individuals and groups holding different points of view engage with each other (112). It is constructed not by individuals but by an interactive dialogic community (Longino 112). So, it is this dialogic relationship that Lucy explores in her quest for (self-) knowledge. Her goal is to have a knowledge of her own, which is not imposed on her by her master, M Paul, (who disappears at the end of the narrative). In the novel, Lucy operates in a literary space where she experiments and constructs a knowledge of her own.

The clear definition of this knowledge remains elusive. It is the result of her epistemological journey in the cameras obsuras of her life and narrative. In these spaces she explores major issues like education, career, religion, versions of

\(^{122}\) As Tony Tanner observes, Lucy’s narrative is one marked by “oscillation,” whereas Jane Eyre’s narrative follows a clearly defined “progression” (qtd in Fenton-Hathaway 145). However, as far as her epistemology is concerned we can see a progress/movement from enclosed spaces to more open ones. The relation between cleverness and self-interest, selflessness and correct knowledge, are motifs that dominate nineteenth-century fiction and mark the progress of most *Bildung* narratives (Levine, *Dying to Know* 11). Autobiographies are most often narratives of discovery.
femininity, art etc. Lucy is influenced by the centripetal forces of patriarchal discourses, but struggles to utter centrifugal discourses on these issues which reflect her own idiosyncratic perception. She aspires to construct an original knowledge in fields like self-knowledge, love, illusion, reality and independence. This knowledge leads her to Truth, which, although declared by Lucy as the only Truth, in fact is a versatile and ambiguous truth which leads her to explore issues like personal restraints, superstition, irrationality, career choices, family making etc.

So, Villette’s ending is open and experimental (Despotopoulou and Kitsi-Mitakou 5) and Lucy remains elusive and ambiguous. Villette’s ending is experimental because, although Lucy has constructed a scientific methodology throughout the novel within the walls of the lab of the camera obscura of her mind, in the end, she cancels any closure in her narrative and provides no clear conclusions. She ‘examined,’ she ‘questioned’ but she remains ambiguous as to what ‘conclusions she formed.’ Instead, she experiences freedom and this freedom is experienced by her readers as well, as they are left free to form whatever conclusions they wish as far as Lucy’s narrative is concerned.

6. CONCLUSION

The camera obscura in Villette becomes the site where the friction between objective and subjective vision takes place. In the beginning of the novel, the objective vision of a marginalized female subject, standing in the periphery of the dark rooms of her mind as well as the dark rooms of the text, silently watching, is gradually challenged by a more subjective and creative type of vision which the female subject engages in her narrative. In the end, the walls of the camera obscura collapse and the borderline
between illusion and reality, subjective and objective perception is blurred and cancelled.

As in *Jane Eyre*, the camera obscura is the main epistemological model of *Villette*. However, in *Villette* the reader witnesses the gradual collapse of this model. The objective gaze of dispassionateness and cool observation inside the “dark room” of Lucy’s mind, which is projected in the narrative of the enclosed spaces of Bretton’s house and Mrs Marchmont’s room among others, is gradually transforming into a more subjective and creative vision, related with Goethe’s subjective theories of colour. This gradual transformation develops together with Lucy’s professional and social progress as an educator as she establishes a dialogic relationship with her environment and experiments with various viewing positions. This progress in epistemological terms signifies a progress from ‘objective’ masculine-like ways of knowing the world to more intuitive feminine ways of knowing.

This new epistemology is made feasible due to Lucy’s role/identity as an educator. When she moves to the new environment of Labassecour and Madame Beck’s house and school, she is exposed to a new context of surveillance and espionage which challenge her viewing routine. This context, her social interaction, as well as her new post as a schoolteacher provide her with the opportunity to experiment with new viewing positions, and adopt the position of a subject who can both see and be seen. It is her profession that drags her out of the darkness of the camera obscura and allows her to develop an interactive and dialogic relationship with her environment, and thus experiment with new perspectives and articulate a centrifugal discourse against centripetal, patriarchal assumptions.

She can boost her epistemological quest by experimenting with new versions of the camera obscura in her narrative. In this process of self-education, Lucy is given
the opportunity to construct her epistemological agency in the fashion of a male scientist who dispassionately observes the object of his experiment by “examining, questioning, and forming conclusions” (V 222). However, at the same time, Lucy appeals to instinct and intuition as her means to acquire knowledge. Thus, she fashions her perception on the grounds of a crossfertilization of both objective and subjective types of vision. This idiosyncratic perception is her epistemological tool which she applies in the process of her self-educating quest of knowledge within a series of versions of cameras obscuras. These take the form of the nursery room, the schoolroom, the confession booth, the chamber, the gallery, the concert hall or the theatre. Within these camerae obscurae, Lucy observes and studies various versions of femininity in an attempt to define her own identity.

In the end of this educating dialogic process, during which Lucy persistently constructs camerae obscurae to experiment with models of femininity and educate herself, the model of the camera obscura collapses. The walls of the camera obscura collapse as Lucy’s inner and the outer world merge, and subjective vision gradually takes over. The result of this epistemological quest is the construction of a “knowledge of her own,” an original knowledge which is based on her own “experiments” and discerning mind, and which evades clear definition. This knowledge is associated with “truth” and “freedom,” it is immune to occult superstition, and aligns with “unorthodox” life choices of career, independence and female emancipation. It is also compatible with the open and ambiguous ending of the novel. Even the very notion of knowledge is questioned or even cancelled in the end, since we will never really know what happened to Paul and Lucy.
Epilogue

“My mind is like a prism full of colours but not of forms.”

This is what Charlotte Brontë says in her juvenile “Passing Events,” constructing the image of the mind in Newtonian terms, that is, as a prism. She was acquainted with Newton and his optical theory as is evident from the fact that Newton’s influence on eighteenth-century poetry echoes in her writing, and more particularly, in her handling of light and colours, as illustrated both in her poems and in parts of her prose writings which describe nature. Also, it is evident that not only was she familiar with optics, but in fact she assimilated the conceptualization of the mind in Newtonian/optical terms, that is, as a prism. Brontë perceived the mind as a prismatic construction which is full of converging and diverging perspectives and voices, and this is reflected on her texts. Her texts are like multi-perspectival spectrums, revealing both centripetal and centrifugal discourses. At the same time, the texts themselves are involved in dialogic processes with prevailing discourses and may either reinforce or undermine them. The heterogeneity of light and its refraction through the prism is analogous to the heterogeneity of discourse in the novel as developed by Bakhtin.

The mind is not depicted, though, only as a prism; Brontë incorporated in her writing another Newtonian metaphor for the mind, that of the camera obscura. Thus, in her novels, the mind is represented as a camera obscura, often drawing not only on Newton’s but also on Locke’s metaphors of the mind. So, it is often depicted as an enclosed space, a chamber, or as a bipartite entity, comprising both the site and the agent of the mental activity.¹²³ So, the camera obscura in Charlotte Brontë’s novels becomes a site of negotiation between the centripetal forces of the objective,

¹²³ As I have already mentioned, Locke’s metaphor of the mind as a bipartite entity is developed by William Walker in his book Locke, Literary Criticism and Philosophy.
rationalized vision of the male experimenter and the emerging, disturbing, centrifugal forces of the subjective vision of an agent who resorts to alternative epistemological tools, like the instinct, and to non-scientific discourses. This representation of the mind as a camera obscura, characterizes the main female characters of Brontë’s novels whose consciousness we follow in her narratives.

In all four novels, the female protagonist’s representation of the mind shows a female character who embarks on an epistemological quest of (self)-knowledge. In all four novels, the heroines as epistemological agents trace a progress from obscurity, darkness and ignorance to light and maturity within the walls of the camerae obscurae of their minds. Within the walls of these cameras, initially they resort to objective and dispassionate vision, trying to accommodate to the ideal of the rational, male subject of the camera obscura but this objectivity is often disrupted by subjective vision, which is textually rendered into narratives of imagination and fantasy. This way, both objective and subjective vision merge within the realm of the camera obscura, creating a spectrum of contesting voices, in an attempt on part of the female epistemological agent to invest with words what she cannot express in conventional ways. Thus, the female epistemological agent resorts to fantasy to render psychological realities, and also explores alternative ways of knowing, like instinct and intuition which are traditionally considered as unreliable, feminine traits. What starts as the camera obscura’s enclosure expands to prismatic narratives, to a spectrum of voices and perspectives which explore alternative epistemologies in an on-going quest for knowledge on part of the female subject.

What is of the utmost importance for the delineation of the female epistemological agent in Brontë’s novels is her occupation as an educator. Since knowledge is created with the interaction between an individual and its social
surroundings, as Longino holds, the post of the educator offers the heroines the opportunity to be drawn out from the obscurity of the camera obscura of a restricted life and start to experiment with various viewing positions and establish a dialogic/interactive relationship with their social environments. Within the realm of the versions of the camerae obscurae in her mind, the educator juxtaposes her mental potential, selfhood and capacities to that of other women. In this experimental research on various typologies of femininity, the female educator constructs her own subjectivity by defining what she is not. She almost colonizes other women and their vision in order to define her own perspective. Her epistemological quest delves into a process of self-exploration and self-education, and discusses issues like the exploration of feminine roles, the articulation of centrifugal discourse against patriarchal assumptions of female subordination, the questioning of marriage as the only option for a woman, the career of the directress of a school for a woman educator, among others.

The result of this epistemological quest is “a knowledge of her own” which, although difficult to define, Brontë associates with originality and Truth. For Charlotte Brontë, the female mind and its education, is a major liberating force for female emancipation, as well as a counterargument to the supposed hereditary, female mental inferiority. The mind offers a paradigm where Brontë discusses her conviction that there is no hereditary inferiority and that education is crucial for the fostering of female capacities. All her main heroines, Mlle Henri, Jane Eyre, Caroline Shirley, and Lucy Snowe are educated women and construct versions of what Charlotte Brontë termed as the “heterogeneous” woman, the woman who is educated, who fosters the capabilities of her mind and who does not pursue assimilation and compromise with her environment but independence and originality of thought.
More specifically, in *The Professor*, the female author experiments with the voice and the perspective of a male narrator. In a story of self-discovery, the tutor-narrator functions as a prism through which aspects of femininity are examined. He reveals his idiosyncratic type of vision, which is a blending of both objective and subjective ways of seeing and is able to distinguish the “real” from the “ideal.” This penetrating type of vision which can distinguish reality from illusion, is employed to examine versions of femininity from a male perspective. In the end, the female educator rises from invisibility and suppression, eligible to attain success both in the public and the private spheres. Mlle Henri is the “two wives” subject, who is always in flux, oscillating between balance and imbalance, in an unresolved tension between centrifugal and centripetal discourses which form the core of the elusive, “heterogeneous” female heroine, employed in all the later Brontë novels. This type of heroine advocates self-exploration and self-education and progress in life both as a social construct and as an epistemological agent.

In *Jane Eyre*, Lockean representations of the mind which draw on the image of the camera obscura are recurrent in a series of versions of camerae obscurae which trace the heroine’s progress from obscurity to enlightenment. In her epistemological quest of self-discovery, Jane Eyre uses other women/versions of femininity, appropriates their viewpoints in order to define her own identity. Although she learns from all these perspectives, Jane Eyre does not fully embrace their viewpoints, but instead develops her own epistemology which emanates from the cross-fertilization of the male and the female elements of the mind. In the end, she defines a new epistemology where groping/touching is defined as enquiry, and intuition is proposed as an alternative epistemological tool which is not identical with witchcraft and deception as traditionally considered.
In *Shirley*, Charlotte Brontë experiments with the split of the main heroine into two separate heroines, who function as the two sides of the same coin. Her story is presented by a third-person narrator. The lack of a first-person narrator and his/her dominating perspective, facilitates the function of the text as a spectrum of converging and diverging voices and perspectives, by means of which social, economical and political issues are discussed. Among the various discourses that this spectrum reveals, is also the epistemological discourse of the female mind and its representation, through a series of camæae obscuræ of Caroline’s mind. The female mind is viewed not as inherently narrow or subordinate to the male mind; any instance of its “narrowness” is attributed to women’s lack of education and profession, a situation for which responsible are their negligent fathers or husbands.

Moreover, in *Shirley* the female mind is based on matrilineage and becomes the site which encloses the genes that are bequeathed from mother to daughter, supporting the idea that “children of the mind are more important than children of the body.” This way, a new, alternative version of womanhood and motherhood is constructed and is embodied by Mrs Pryor, Caroline’s mother, who is happy to see her reflection not on the face and the body of her daughter but on her mind. At the same time, this type of matrilineage proposes the image of Caroline as an alternative heiress who does not inherit any money or title from her father but inherits the mind and the genes of her mother. So, in *Shirley*, an attribute that defines womanhood is the mind and not traditional traits like beauty and grace. In *Shirley’s* multicoloured narrative, the objective and detached vision of the camera obscura is disrupted by subjective vision, by narratives of imagination and fantasy that reveal her epistemological tools, which explore new alternative and traditionally female ways of knowing, such as instinct.
In *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë, after having experimented with a male narrator in *The Professor*, with a female narrator in *Jane Eyre* and with the third-person narration, and the split main female heroine in *Shirley*, returns to the first-person autobiographical account where the reader has access to the consciousness of a single character. The narrative is filtered through the main heroine’s prism and we follow her account of events, thoughts and feelings. The spectrum of various issues develops in *Villette* in a way different from *Shirley*’s due to the narrator. The first-person narrator and her dominating voice and consciousness construct versions of camerae obscurae, within the walls of which are discussed various issues such as spinsterhood, religion, art, gender roles in society, science, theatrical performance, the disjunction between reality and illusion, and the disparity between truth and appearances, to name but a few.

In the first chapters of *Villette*, Lucy is like a scientist, who in a dispassionate and detached way studies the world around her, in the shadows of her camera obscura. This way, Lucy embodies the female version of the subject of the camera obscura, which is decorporalized, elusive and constantly in flux throughout the whole novel remaining unresolved until the end. So, she constructs an experimental, alternative female version of the subject of the camera obscura, flirting with the image and the perception of the scientist.

In a series of versions of the camera obscura, Lucy experiments with different viewing positions and develops her own epistemological discourse. In the beginning, she is a shadow-figure who observes what happens around her, remaining unobserved. Gradually, she uses her profession as a teacher as well as her acting in order to experiment with more advantageous viewing positions where she can both see and be seen. Her schoolroom, both as a space where teaching occurs as a well as a
room where a theatrical play takes place, becomes an idiosyncratic camera obscura. Rather than choosing a dark side from where hidden she can observe, she mounts on a teacher’s desk or a stage which she uses as a Panopticon, from where she sees everybody and at the same time she is exposed and is seen teaching or performing.

What is produced in such camerae obscurae is knowledge, a highly self-educating experimentation which leads to new aspects of self-perception for Lucy. The end of her epistemological quest is what she herself terms as a knowledge of her own. She cannot even determine what exactly this knowledge is, but associates it with freedom and truth, and represents it with the imagery of the open fields of the schoolhouse she runs, as well as with the imaginative narrative of the ship wreckage at the end of her story. By means of the experimental, ambiguous and open ending of her story, Lucy frustrates our need for conclusions. In the end, the restricted area of the camera obscura of Lucy’s mind collapses, since Villette’s ending is an open ending which is not confined within the walls of a camera obscura. After this collapse, Lucy returns to the image of the mind of her juvenilia, that is, the mind which “is like a prism, full of colours but not of forms.” In other words, her mind, like a prism, is full of the colours of diverging and converging voices and perspectives, and free from the confinement of the camera obscura and the rationalized vision it entails.

Discussion on Villette extends in two chapters for a number of reasons. In this novel there is abundant reference to optical devices, various forms of vision and generally the optical discourse. In addition, Villette best illustrates the decorpolization of the subject of the camera obscura, because Lucy is a shadow figure and the characteristics of her physical appearance are never clearly described to the reader. Moreover, this novel is idiosyncratic in the sense that it cancels the typology of the previous novels: not only does it construct a series of versions of the camera obscura
but it also shows the collapse of the camera obscura. Finally, Brontë’s chronologically
last novel is a more mature work showing the end of a process; Brontë’s return to the
first-person narration is a mature choice on her part, which proves to be the most
convenient way for her to express what she wants to say.

To conclude, Charlotte Brontë incorporates Newton’s optical theories in her
writing in a number of ways: first, in the handling of light and colours in her poetry
and prose; second, in the construction of her narratives which are like prisms and
spectrums full of converging and diverging voices and perspectives; and third, in the
representation of the mind both as a prism and as a camera obscura. This
representation of the mind reflects Brontë’s experimentation with the concept of
gendered epistemological agency. In her novels, she prioritizes the female educator as
an exemplary image of female epistemological agency, who, thanks to her profession,
is drawn away from obscurity, experiments with different viewing positions and
establishes a dialogic relation with her social environment. As a result, the female
educator constructs an epistemological discourse which prioritizes the female mind
and mental qualities, foregrounds alternative and feminine ways of knowing, like
intuition, and helps the female subject express herself in narrative spectrums full of
both realistic accounts and narratives of fantasy. The perception and the epistemic
viewpoint of the female educator are tested against the epistemic viewpoints of other
women in the novels. In the end, the female educator is foregrounded as an
empowered “heterogeneous” woman, whose mental power and originality of thought
make her unique, as she progresses from ignorance to knowledge, and from obscurity
and darkness to light, constructing ‘a knowledge of her own.’
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