

A Madwoman for Every Room in the House:
Eating Disorders, Schizophrenia and Other Forms of Insanity
in Seven Victorian Novels

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"On my honor, I pledge that I have neither given nor received
any unacknowledged aid on this Senior Honors Thesis in English."

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Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I	
Madwives and Spinsters: The Link Between Sexual Repression and Insanity	5
Chapter II	
The Madness of Self-Starvation: Physical Hunger as a Metaphor for Emotional Longing	24
Chapter III	
A Madwoman for Every Room in the House: Puerperal Mania, Depression, Schizophrenia and Various Other Forms of Mental Illness	43
Bibliography	61

Introduction

The subject of insanity, particularly in female characters, in British novels first attracted my attention while studying nineteenth century Gothic novels with my tutor in Oxford last year. I began looking at "sensation" novels several weeks later, and the plight, as well as the plenitude, of "crazy women" in this genre of fiction fascinated me. When it came to thinking about how to approach this project, however, I was rather at a loss. The interests I have actually pursued in writing this paper include several different topics, not all of which relate specifically to "insanity," but I believe that insanity is the central link which holds what might appear to be disparate topics together.

One of the first books I examined in my research was Winifred Hughes' The Maniac in the Cellar, Sensation Novels of the 1860s, which started me thinking more seriously about the subordinate role of women in male-dominated Victorian society. Hughes suggests that the political and sexual repression of women informs society's perception of women's "bizarre" or "abnormal" self-assertive behavior as "madness." I then began to concentrate on this aspect of "insanity" in Victorian fiction, focusing in particular on sexual desire and repression in female characters.

A discussion of sexual repression, and its "proper" expression in the Victorian novel, is of course closely linked to

women's position in Victorian society. This fact led me to include some discussion of attitudes toward marriage, and the ways in which marriage was viewed as a trap by many women. Marriage was the only proper means of sexual expression; but, at the same time, it forced a woman to subordinate herself to her husband's wishes, thereby more often than not causing her to lose her independence in the process.

Mary Wollstonecraft's Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman provides the most drastic example of this view of marriage as a severe limitation of women's freedom. This section of my research also includes an examination of Jane Eyre's struggle to master her passionate nature, and some of the varied critical interpretations engendered by Charlotte Brontë's unconventional attitudes towards marriage. Brontë again addresses the issues of sexual repression and marriage in ambivalent terms in the character of Lucy Snowe in Villette.

I was pleased with the results I was seeing in this line of research, but I began to feel I was straying too far from my primary interest in insanity by focusing too narrowly on passion and repression. After all, I did not want to write a paper about the stance Victorian writers take on sex; I was more interested in what they have to say about insanity. In seeking to draw my discussion more sharply in this direction, I came upon an analogy in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic between Catherine Linton's hunger strike and anorexia nervosa. This connection seemed to be more in line with what I had in mind

originally, and in the course of my reading, I had found that physical hunger was often used as a metaphor for the repression of sexual desire. So I decided to pursue this strand throughout my second chapter, with the understanding that "anorexia" had not been defined at the time that these novels were written. Therefore I use the term rather loosely, not to describe, anachronistically, a medical condition, but to refer to general trends which I explain in the course of my discussion.

In the same vein, Gilbert and Gubar also refer to Lucy Snowe's condition as one which resembles schizophrenia. This comparison was especially interesting to me because much of my research on sexual desire and repression seemed to reiterate this idea of a division within the self, which often leads to a character's losing sight of reality. Schizophrenia is a difficult condition to diagnose, and again I do not apply this term in a strictly medical sense, but as a means of designating a particular set of "symptoms" which various characters display. For example, Lucy's paranoid hallucinations involve a "split from reality" which Emily Brontë's Catherine Earnshaw Linton also seems to suffer from in her famous mad scene in Wuthering Heights. I examine such "schizophrenic" and various other forms of mad behavior in my third chapter. In particular, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's heroine exhibits symptoms of puerperal mania in Lady Audley's Secret, and Charles Dickens' Miss Havisham presents an unusual case in Great Expectations; her extreme depression and bitterness over a disappointment in love taint her

attitude toward both men and life.

Also included in this last section is a discussion of the uninhibited expressions of passion which are allowed in some of these same novels, such as the role which Bertha's lascivious degeneration plays in Jane Eyre. Similarly, the effects produced by allowing passion to remain unrestrained in both Mary Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret and Matthew Lewis' The Monk lead the protagonists either to attempt or to actually commit murder. And finally, the extremes of passion which both Catherine and Heathcliff display in Wuthering Heights lead to her longing for an escape through death, and to his degeneration into apparent savagery.

While I cannot claim to have learned nearly as much as there is to know on this subject, I have, if nothing else, become even more interested in it than I was when I began. In the last few weeks I have reflected upon the fact that this senior project is by no means "ground-breaking" in terms of any (tenuous) conclusions I may have reached. However, I am hopeful that it is at least a solid foundation in a field of research which I imagine will continue to fascinate me long after my thesis has been completed.

Chapter I

Madwives and Spinsters:

The Link Between Sexual Repression and Insanity

Almost any expression of passion or sexuality by women, or other forms of self-assertive behavior outside of the domain of the home, was viewed by Victorian society as unusual, and therefore considered "abnormal." Young women were taught from childhood that their goals in life revolved primarily around love and marriage. Women were brought up to believe that the greatest fulfillment possible to them would come through wifedom and motherhood. As Shirley Foster explains in Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual, "marriage was deemed the apotheosis of womanly fulfillment, alternatives to which were regarded as pitiable or unnatural" (6). The irony in the situation facing young Victorian women becomes apparent in the census figures which Foster quotes: in 1851 "there were 2,765,000 single women over the age of fifteen, and by 1871 this figure had increased to 3,228,700" (7). Even if one allows for a considerable margin of error in these statistics, the indisputable fact remains that "a considerable proportion of females could never expect to experience matrimony" (Foster 7). Thus, countless females who had been taught only the importance of "catching" a husband, and nothing of what they might do if they failed in this endeavor, were left unprovided for and ill-

equipped to find means to provide for themselves.

Foster further explains that "Such frustration was compounded by the recognition that, ironically enough, singleness was in many ways a more attractive proposition than the married state," in terms of legal and property rights, for example (7). While these conditions improved somewhat with legislative measures such as the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 ("enabling wives to keep their own property and earnings"), injustices were still widespread, and the realities of marriage could be strikingly dissimilar to the ideal presented to single women who were urged into marriage by their families (Foster 8). Spinsters, on the other hand, could "run their own lives; no wonder that such independence, lacking though it might be in emotional enrichment, had its strong attractions" (Foster 8). As indicated by the statistics quoted above, however, many women who would gladly have relinquished the "strong attractions" of spinsterhood were never given such a choice!

Women who failed to elicit marriage proposals were pitied and often ridiculed, while women who chose to resist the norm prescribed for them by society were perceived by many (including other women) as dangerously subversive. Rebellious behavior deemed heroic in men was often regarded as madness in women. As Karen F. Stein puts it, "For women...assertions of questing selfhood have been deemed bizarre and crazy; consequently the Gothic mode--and in particular the concept of self as monster--is associated with narratives of female experience" (123). The term

"Female Gothic," coined by Ellen Moers, describes the genre of fiction which arose in response to the need for women to express something of this assertive part of their natures, which they were forced to hide, and which was regarded by society as monstrous:

In their Gothic narratives women reveal deep-seated conflicts between a socially acceptable passive, congenial, 'feminine' self and a suppressed, monstrous hidden self. The monster remains an apt symbol for turbulent inner compulsions...the madwoman serves a similar symbolic function, and this figure appears more frequently in prose fiction. While the monster is a physical emblem of unescapable stigma, madness is a more subjective aberration which may be overcome when the character or society ceases to regard certain types of behavior as monstrous or crazy. In earlier versions of this genre no escape from social denigration and self-hatred is conceivable; in these closed-end works monsters are more prevalent and madwomen are unredeemable. (Stein 123)

The frequency with which Victorian novelists turn toward the madwoman to symbolize "turbulent inner compulsions" comments significantly on women's perceptions of their own position in society. Such madwomen as Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre and Miss Havisham in Great Expectations are clearly "unredeemable." Many critics believe Bertha functions in the manner Stein describes above, serving as a monstrous "double" for Jane. Bertha represents the frightening possibilities of Jane's expressing her sexuality and losing control of the fiery, passionate side of her nature. While Miss Havisham is not made hideous or bestial by her madness, she is equally unredeemable. Her distorted views of love and marriage are so deeply ingrained in her that, in the

process of poisoning her own mind, her neurosis becomes irreversible.

Stein's essay "Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic" also suggests some of the reasons behind the frequent use of insanity in gothic novels. She posits the madness of the Gothic heroine as her creator's covert method of criticizing "the society which has prevented her from developing her full human potential" (Stein 126). Moreover, these characters who are perceived by others as "mad," when finding themselves "locked into the 'devalued female role,' powerless, frustrated and angry," often focus their own perceptions of themselves on madness and monstrosity (Stein 126). In the "closed-end" situation presented in Lady Audley's Secret, for example, Mary Elizabeth Braddon lashes out against the society which dictates that women left on their own should simply wait at home for their husbands to return. Lady Audley's self-assertive behavior is perceived by observers in her society as mad, and even her perception of herself is molded by society in such a way that she too is convinced that her actions, which are out of the ordinary, constitute "madness."

Insanity often served as a convenient label for women who showed any signs of rebellion from the limited aspirations ascribed to them by male-dominated society. Fathers and husbands who felt threatened by women's behavior were able to lock them away in mental institutions (or attics) with very little provocation, and the conjectural nature of insanity as an illness

often assisted in placing perfectly lucid women in madhouses:

Madness has proved a difficult term to define. Assessments of sanity are highly subjective, even among medical professionals. This subjective assessment is particularly true for women. The label of insanity has frequently been ascribed to women who fail to perform housewife's tasks, or who deviate from the 'average' norms of expected behavior. (Stein 125)

For example, Mary Wollstonecraft's fragment Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman tells the story of a young woman whose husband is very easily and conveniently able to put her in an insane asylum after he has obtained all the legal rights to her family inheritance through their marriage. Maria is labeled as insane and locked away in a private madhouse because she decides to leave her husband. She has valid reasons for doing so, but these are never taken into consideration. Maria's husband has the indisputable right to put her away simply by claiming that he thinks she is mad.

The Wrongs of Woman is a bitter attack on the status of women in Victorian society, and on the effective silencing of women by the very institution which purports to offer them self-fulfillment. Maria's husband George Venables uses her to extort money from her wealthy uncle throughout their marriage, and when she finally refuses to ask her uncle for any more money to pay off his gambling debts, George tries to offer her in prostitution to a friend of his. Although she is pregnant at the time, she decides that such gross indecency serves to absolve her from all ties to him. She leaves the house and lives on her own through

her pregnancy, with George hounding her constantly. Finally he has her drugged and taken to a private madhouse, while the baby is snatched out of her arms and taken elsewhere. The heroine has no legal rights to speak for herself, and her husband is able to get her out of his way with very little trouble. Of course Maria is not really insane at all, but George is legally able to put her in an asylum on a pretence, and make arrangements with the keeper (who, as the reader later learns, turns out to be a fraud) to retain her there indefinitely.

The fragment was left unfinished when Wollstonecraft died in 1797, and published posthumously by her husband William Godwin. As Moira Ferguson comments in her introduction, at the time that The Wrongs of Woman was written, marriage laws not only decreed that women forfeit any property rights to their husbands, but also made it extremely difficult for women to get a divorce:

The law subsumed all married women within their husband's identity--women were de jure and de facto the property of their spouses. No money was theirs by right. If they were heiresses... and they married, their money automatically transferred to their husbands. They were denied child custody. A married woman could not leave her husband unless he continually beat her. If she left her husband, she could be compelled to return by law or physical force. Divorce for women was almost impossible. Single women fared little better, and...women from the lowest social class fared even worse. (Ferguson 9-10)

In a letter to a friend, Wollstonecraft herself adds, "These appear to me (matrimonial despotism of heart and conduct) to be the peculiar Wrongs of Woman, because they degrade the mind" (8). Ferguson continues by explaining that the "wrongs of woman" of

Wollstonecraft's subtitle are "the legally and socially permissible acts of injustice perpetrated against women in eighteenth-century Britain" (9). She further declares that "Married women were virtually non-persons" in the eyes of the courts in the eighteenth century (9).

The characters and situations in some instances in The Wrongs of Woman seem forced or contrived (for example, the misfortunes of Jemima the maid seem far too numerous to be believable), and the social purpose behind the story leaps out at the reader as blatantly obvious. Yet, as indicated in the notes she left for a preface, Wollstonecraft herself is aware of these problems and accepts them as the alternative to sacrificing her main concern with exposing the injustice of the current legal system:

In writing this novel, I have rather endeavoured to pourtray [sic] passions than manners. In many instances I could have made the incidents more dramatic, would I have sacrificed my main object, the desire of exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society. In the invention of the story, this view restrained my fancy; and the history ought rather to be considered, as of woman, than of an individual.
(7)

Wollstonecraft thus uses the fictional setting she creates to depict the ways in which "the denial of all civil and political rights keeps every class of women from true fulfillment in their day-to-day existence" (10). Wollstonecraft shows the reader (through Jemima's story as well as through the stories of several other poor women) that women from the lowest social class fared

even worse than Maria herself. Jemima's story is told in detail, and as Ferguson points out, her "life is a case history of the problems of the neglected poor generally, and the fact that she is a woman greatly intensifies her plight" (19). Her story and the briefer vignettes of other oppressed women are intended to indicate the appalling overall predicament of the poor. To take just one example, the landlady of one of the houses where Maria stays when she leaves George has a husband who repeatedly leaves her and then comes back only to rob her and pawn her possessions before leaving again! Of course, this woman has even less recourse to the law than Maria, because her poverty would prevent her from being able to pay the court fees.

While in the asylum, Maria writes out her memoirs for the daughter who has been taken from her, to warn her against the injustices women so often encounter in marriage. It is in this context that Mary Wollstonecraft's personal political views most often intrude, and her heroine's laments are justifiably and intensely bitter:

The tender mother cannot lawfully snatch from the gripe [sic] of the grumbling spendthrift, or beastly drunkard, unmindful of his offspring, the fortune which falls to her by chance; or (so flagrant is the injustice) what she earns by her own exertions. No; he can rob her with impunity, even to waste publicly on a courtesan; and the laws of her country--if women have a country--afford her no protection or redress from the oppressor, unless she have the plea of bodily Fear; yet how many ways are there of goading the soul almost to madness, equally unmanly, though not so mean? When such laws were framed, should not impartial lawgivers have first decreed...to fix the...belief, that the husband should always be wiser and more

virtuous than his wife, in order to entitle him, with a show of justice, to keep this idiot, or perpetual minor, for ever in bondage. (108)

The extreme bitterness of Maria's complaint strikes the reader throughout this passage. Her sense of being utterly powerless and neglected in society is perhaps best articulated in her questioning whether or not women can even claim to have a country. Her outrage is directed primarily toward the injustice of laws which are founded upon a false assumption--that men are always virtuous and women are always idiots. Earlier in her memoirs, Maria describes her marriage to George as "fetters... that ate into my very vitals," and exclaims, "For what am I reserved? Why was I not born a man, or why was I born at all?" (90). Here her desperation reaches a level of such intensity that she even finds herself wishing she were a man, because she knows that in the present condition of her society, wishing for women's oppression to be alleviated is futile.

Passion and sexuality play a central role in The Wrongs of Woman. Although Maria does commit adultery with Henry Darnford while still technically married to George, George's gross profligacy provides a foil for Maria's healthy expression of her own sexuality. George is portrayed as grossly lascivious before and after his marriage. He has fathered an illegitimate child whose mother, a servant-girl, he sent away upon his marriage, "her situation being too visible" (98). Maria is appalled to learn that after the girl's death, George almost completely neglects the child, and she herself helps to pay for its care.

When Maria announces that she will no longer use pretexts to obtain money from her uncle, she and George become estranged, and he disgusts her with his fondness for women, which she describes as being "of the grossest kind, ...entirely promiscuous, and of the most brutal nature" (94). Maria also specifically condemns George for his offer to sell her in prostitution to another man; this becomes the final injustice which decides her to leave him. However, George claims that he is merely trying to be "liberal," and suggests that they would both be happier if each pursued his or her own romantic and sexual interests outside of their marriage.

From the attitude taken towards sexuality elsewhere in the novel, it would seem that Wollstonecraft's own views are also liberal. Maria abhors her husband's attempts to encourage another man to make sexual advances towards her. Yet once she considers that she has been absolved of her ties to him, she freely and openly commits adultery with Henry Darnford, a man she falls in love with while in the asylum. Wollstonecraft's presentation of sex in the fragment is also extremely straightforward. Such a liberal view towards sexuality seems indicative of Wollstonecraft's own desire to see greater opportunities for women to express their independence in all aspects of life. Maria openly discusses sex (in her memoirs to her daughter) and confesses that once she discovers George's true character as a gambler and profligate, she finds having sex with him abhorrent:

His renewed caresses then became hateful to me; his brutality was tolerable, compared to his distasteful fondness. Still, compassion and the fear of insulting his supposed feelings, by a want of sympathy, made me dissemble, and do violence to my delicacy. What a task! (100)

It is of course in doing "violence to her delicacy" that Maria becomes pregnant. George refers to her condition when defending himself after his attempt to sell her, and accuses her of enjoying sex by saying that she "was not without her passions... and a husband was a convenient cloke" (117). Again, when Maria and Darnford first consummate their passion, while still in the asylum, it is clear from Wollstonecraft's presentation of the situation that Maria is unembarrassed by her sexuality. She freely "gives herself" to Darnford, "as in marriage" (137). This assertion becomes ironic, however, both because Maria felt it was a "task" to have sex with her husband, and because Darnford later abandons Maria without marrying her.

When the fraudulent keeper flees the country in order to avoid arrest, Maria and Darnford escape from the asylum and live together, and Maria again becomes pregnant. George later sues Darnford for adultery and seduction. As Darnford needs to go to Paris immediately to see to his financial affairs, Maria "took the task of conducting Darnford's defence upon herself. She instructed his counsel to plead guilty to the charge of adultery; but to deny that of seduction" (145). The plaintiff's opening statement arouses such a strong sense of injustice in Maria that, "convinced that the subterfuges of the law were disgraceful," she writes a paper which she arranges to have read in court,

explaining the true nature of the injustices she has endured from her husband (146). Maria makes it clear that she feels justified in her response to George's atrocious behavior both to her and to her baby (whom she later learns has died from neglect) by considering herself free of all ties to him. The judge's reaction to her declaration is almost ridiculous to a modern reader, it seems so abominable:

[He] alluded to 'the fallacy of letting women plead their feelings, as an excuse for the violation of the marriage-vow. For his part, he had always determined to oppose all innovation, and the new-fangled notions which incroached on the good old rules of conduct. We did not want French principles in public or private life--and, if women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was opening a flood-gate for immorality. What virtuous woman thought of her feelings?--It was her duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience to judge better for her, than she could for herself.'
(149)

The intransigence of the judge's attitude clearly indicates Wollstonecraft's intense feelings of anger and frustration at women's position in Victorian society. Again, the primary complaint seems to be that the judge takes none of Maria's reasons or circumstances into account; he is merely afraid of setting a precedent for women seeking divorces!

While several possible endings are outlined and only brief sketches and fragments of sentences are left in places, it is evident from the notes Wollstonecraft left that she planned to have Darnford become unfaithful to Maria and desert her and their child (152). Consistent with Wollstonecraft's radical feminism,

this intention could be read as a vituperative attack on male duplicity, and on the potential perils of entrapment awaiting women in any marriage.

An underlying criticism of Victorian society also appears to be a motivating force for Charlotte Brontë in creating the "bizarre" behavior of her female characters. The personal frustration and anger which Brontë feels regarding the "devalued female role" in her society is constantly reworked through the medium of her fictional heroines. Brontë offers no entirely satisfactory solution to the problem of how to improve women's status in Victorian society because she herself is searching for, but does not have, the answers. As Brontë knew, the only socially acceptable escape from lonely spinsterhood (which in essence amounted to a form of non-existence), was marriage. However, she could not fully accept this as the only alternative, because she realized how limiting marriage could be in terms of individual expression. Brontë's ambiguity toward "the woman question" manifests itself in her fictional heroines. The limited scope of employment available to women particularly troubled Brontë, yet her feminist sentiments were by no means radical compared to those of her predecessor Mary Wollstonecraft. While Brontë clearly understood the threat to women's sense of self posed by an obsession with marriage, she herself was still motivated by a natural desire to be loved. She could never quite relinquish the belief that a congenial married state represented the greatest possibility of self-realization for most women

(Foster 72).

Shirley Foster's observations on Brontë's personal life shed some light on the source of Brontë's ambivalence towards sexuality and marriage. From a young age, Brontë had a "morbid conviction of her own sexual unattractiveness," and while she seems to have been reconciled to a lack of physical beauty, she did experience feelings of loneliness which caused her great anxiety (72):

Despite her assertions that wholly domestic notions of womanhood must be replaced by a creed of female self-help, Brontë could not ignore the powerful counter-claims of emotional needs which a single life failed to meet....

Ambivalence characterizes many of her statements about singlehood. Alongside her optimism about female self-dependence,...her terror of becoming a stern and selfish spinster, and her sense of blankness 'because I am a lonely woman and am likely to be lonely', reveal her increasing unease about the viability of a fulfilling independent existence. Her inability to resolve the dilemma is due partly to her own deep need to love and be loved. (Foster 75)

It is precisely this "deep need to love and be loved" which motivates Jane throughout her story. As she gets older she must learn to temper her emotions, but the passion with which Jane places primacy on love never abates. After she is humiliated in front of the other girls at Lowood by Mr. Brocklehurst's accusation that she is a liar, Jane pours out her feelings to Helen Burns: "I should think well of myself; but that is not enough: if others don't love me, I would rather die than live--I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen" (101). Jane's admission to Helen that her own good opinion of herself is not

enough to satisfy her is telling in view of her past relations with the Reeds. She knows that she did everything she could to make herself pleasant while living with them, and that she certainly put more effort into behaving congenially than they did. Yet this was not enough for Jane; she was utterly miserable living with the Reeds because she could neither give nor receive any affection there.

While telling Helen of the injustices she suffered at the hands of John and Mrs. Reed, Jane admits to the reader that she allows her volatile emotions to control her: "Bitter and truculent when excited, I spoke as I felt, without reserve or softening" (90). The older Jane is able to modify her outlook significantly, but this same impetuous manner characterizes much of her speech early in the novel. Again, when speaking to Helen of the incident with Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane continues:

Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest. (101)

Helen's reply articulates the lesson which Jane must learn:

"Hush, Jane! you think too much of the love of human beings; you are too impulsive, too vehement" (101). As Foster puts it, "The extremity of this attitude has to be tempered as Jane learns, but its ideological foundation is not challenged. Throughout, Jane speaks for feeling over reason" (85). Jane sees Helen as a "good" person, but she recognizes the fundamental disparity between their outlooks on life. Helen can endure suffering

because she thinks too little of the love of human beings; she lives essentially for her faith in God and in another, better existence apart from the present. Jane "perhaps learns some self-control from this extremely undemanding person; but on the whole admires her as a different kind of human and goes her own, more worldly, way" (Maynard 108). While Jane feels love and admiration for Helen, and craves affection from her, it is important that she is able to recognize that she could never accept Helen's philosophy of living for herself.

Jane eventually can and does learn to keep her emotions from erupting in violent outbursts, but the emotions themselves are still there. She longs for love as intensely at the end of the novel as she does as a child. She cannot deny her constitutional and immediate need for love, nor does she feel that it would be desirable to completely subordinate feeling to reason; for Jane, existence without affection would be meaningless. She thus recognizes a similar incompatibility with St. John later in the novel. Much as Helen lived for her certainty of a happier existence in heaven, St. John's dogmatic sense of duty replaces his need for human love. Jane's primary reason for refusing to marry St. John centers around the fact that it would be a marriage without the kind of love she needs, which to her would be infinitely worse than existence as a spinster. Yet ultimately, for Jane to marry, she must not only subdue and alter the passionate nature of her personality, but Rochester must be physically maimed, in order to lessen her actual dependence upon

him. This factor makes the marriage seem more equal in the reader's perception, because the two characters are more equally dependent upon one another.

Such ambiguity regarding marriage may also be why, in Villette, Brontë refuses to gratify the reader's expectation that Lucy and M. Paul will actually wed. She leaves the question open to speculation; her reader is forced to think about women's place in society, and to join her in searching for viable alternatives. This intensely yearning questioning becomes problematic for the reader because Brontë herself despairs of finding any answers, and therefore can offer the reader little assistance beyond focusing attention on the problem. Marilyn Maxwell's essay "Socialization of Women: A View from Literature" offers further insight into Brontë's ambivalence in concluding Lucy's story. Maxwell speculates that if M. Paul does return to marry Lucy, "her 'joyful' submission to the patriarchal other will eventually be exposed as psychologically fraudulent behavior that will leave her financially secure but fundamentally depressed" (231). According to this assumption, even though the years Lucy spends in anticipation of her marriage are "the three happiest" of her life, if she were to actually marry, she would soon feel stifled (614).

Shirley Foster's introductory chapter on "Women and Marriage in Mid-Nineteenth Century England" briefly outlines the philosophy of several Mid-Victorian feminists ("many of whom would not even have included themselves under that heading"),

both "radical" and "cautious" (8). Her comment on Florence Nightingale is indicative of the ambiguity often surrounding what she refers to as "'the woman question'": "It is a nice irony that one of the mid-century's most radical female protestors was sainted for her quasi-maternal service and self-abnegation" (9-10). Nightingale was particularly concerned with the lack of employment or other creative outlets for natural energy available to young women in Victorian society. She was convinced that women had to be "freed" from the "crippling bondage of family and matrimonial ties" before they could exist as "true individuals" (Foster 10).

Elaine Showalter, in a chapter entitled "The Rise of the Victorian Madwoman," also refers specifically to Florence Nightingale's personal situation as described in letters, journals, and an autobiographical novel, Cassandra. Showalter claims that one way to interpret illness in reaction to sexual repression is as a socially acceptable way for women to remain unmarried, and she draws upon quotes from Nightingale's journal to support her assertion:

Women's lives are eaten up in fantasy, the product of repressed sexuality, boredom, and vacuity....Deprived of significant spheres of action and forced to define themselves only in personal relationships, women become more and more dependent on their inner lives, more prone to depression and breakdown. Sickness presents a tempting escape from the contingency of the feminine role; it offers a respectable reason to be alone, and real, if perverse, opportunities for self-development. (64)

Such reactions to repression manifest themselves repeatedly in

both physical and mental illnesses in numerous literary works throughout the Victorian period. Physical "illness" occurs remarkably often in the form of weakness brought on by a sort of anorexia nervosa, which will be the focus of Chapter II. The motifs of starvation and weakness figure prominently in Charlotte Brontë's Villette and Jane Eyre, Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights and the subplot of Matthew Lewis's The Monk. "Mental illnesses" (puerperal mania, depression, schizophrenia and other hysterical or otherwise uncontrollable behavior), the subject of Chapter III, figure with varying degrees of prominence in some of these same novels, as well as in Charles Dickens's Great Expectations and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret.

Chapter II

The Madness of Self-Starvation:

Physical Hunger as a Metaphor for Emotional Longing

A peculiar thought pattern seems to be rather consistently associated with insanity in Victorian culture. Many of the heroines in the novels discussed in Chapter I share a particular death wish, that of committing suicide by starvation. In Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, Catherine articulates her feelings of powerlessness through the urgent and desperate action of a hunger strike. Mary Wollstonecraft's Maria in The Wrongs of Woman refuses to eat when first imprisoned in the madhouse. Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Brontë's Villette and Agnes, a minor character in Lewis' The Monk, also find themselves in situations where they almost die of starvation. In Lucy's case, she is "starving" for affection, and although not necessarily considered mad, is suffering from the effects of severe depression. Agnes' starvation is used as a punishment for her sexuality, which makes her impure, rather than insane, in the eyes of the Prioress of her convent. In each of these situations, physical hunger functions as a metaphor for the repression of the heroine's emotional and sexual being.

A modern understanding of anorexia nervosa provides psychological insight into the not so uncommon phenomenon of women's self-starvation in Victorian novels. Susie Orbach's

Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for our Age

describes anorexia as being at least in part a sort of "political" protest in which the hunger strike serves as the only means for an anorectic to articulate her feelings:

We begin to see the anorexia as an attempt at empowering, and the food refusal as the action of one whose cause has been derogated, dismissed or denied. There is an urgency and a strength in the refusal to eat. This is no mere passing whim but the action of someone either desperate, fearless or both. To subject one's body to the rigours of starvation--to keep it fed only to the absolute minimum required to ensure survival--is an act of extraordinary desperation and courage. (102)

This view of self-starvation as "an act of extraordinary desperation and courage" is especially applicable in the case of Catherine Linton's hunger strike. Intense feelings of powerlessness which cause a character to feel "either desperate, fearless or both" factor into most of the other examples of starvation to be discussed in this chapter as well.

In the opening scenes of Wollstonecraft's Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman, Maria is manacled in her cell in an insane asylum. The maid Jemima's first comments upon entering the room have to do with Maria's refusal to eat: "Could anything but madness produce such a disgust for food?" (24). Jemima elaborates on this association between self-starvation and a form of insanity by saying: "you must and shall eat something. I have had many ladies under my care, who have resolved to starve themselves; but, soon or late, they gave up their intent, as they recovered their senses" (25). In this situation, Maria's despair

is primarily the result of losing her daughter, but it is interesting that Jemima somehow equates the desire to starve oneself with a kind of madness.

This remarkably common association of a suicidal desire to starve oneself with insanity is often manifest in the form of an analogy between sexual repression and physical hunger. Perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon is Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Brontë's Villette. Brontë effectively employs the motif of physical hunger, and the state of near starvation, to illustrate her heroine's repressed state of mind. After Lucy collapses in the streets of Villette as a result of her nervous fever, she finds herself in the home of her god-mother, Mrs. Bretton, and discovers that she is hungry:

The fever, the real malady which had oppressed my frame, was abating; for, whereas during the last nine days I had taken no solid food, and suffered from continual thirst, this morning, on breakfast being offered, I experienced a craving for nourishment--an inward faintness which caused me eagerly to taste the tea this lady offered, and to eat the morsel of dry toast she allowed in accompaniment. It was only a morsel, but it sufficed, keeping up my strength til some two or three hours afterwards, when the bonne brought me a little cup of broth and a biscuit. (195)

This passage is one of the few examples in Villette where Brontë actually describes physical hunger. Wherever it does appear, however, it serves as an apt metaphor for Lucy's emotional "hunger." Throughout most of the novel, Lucy receives no "solid food" in terms of love or recognition of her sexuality, and as a result, she has a continual "craving for nourishment" with which

to feed her heart. She does have friends, or at least acquaintances, who serve to provide her with the "morsels" of affection which give her enough strength to last until the next tiny morsel is offered. Lucy's early relationships with Miss Marchmont, Graham and Madame Beck are such that they do not provide Lucy with any "solid food"--she can respect all of these people, feel a reserved affection for them, and have pleasant, formal relationships with them, but she neither loves nor is truly loved by any of them. Her later relationships with Dr. John, Mrs. Bretton and Polly, and with M. Paul are more substantial, though still only morsels.

The first significant "morsel" Lucy receives is the handful of letters from Dr. John. She tastes these eagerly, however much they may resemble dry toast in terms of substantiality (they are written in friendship, benevolence, and sincere regard, but not in love; they are morsels rather than full meals). Lucy's spirits have been weakened by such a long absence of real affection that this morsel becomes necessary in order to keep up her strength. The vitality she is able to regain from the emotional nourishment, however meager, provided by these letters enables her to survive until another small morsel can be secured.

Lucy becomes very "hungry" again, however, because in spite of the valuable friendships she develops with Mrs. Bretton and Paulina, and with Dr. John himself, she is still forced to repress her sexuality. The affection she receives from friendships with females (and with males) is important, of

course, but she still has no release for her sexuality, and therefore cannot be completely satisfied. She is still hungry because the "food" she is receiving does not constitute a balanced diet.

Lucy's friendly, indeed almost brotherly, relationship with M. Paul ultimately blossoms into the love which acknowledges her sexuality and ends her hunger. However, Brontë is not entirely willing to solve the problem with a fairy tale ending. The reader is left to "hope," and to "picture union and a happy succeeding life," but is not actually given the assurance that M. Paul returns to marry Lucy (617). Marriage was the only solution many Victorians could conceive of to Lucy's problem, but by leaving the conclusion open to doubt, Brontë is questioning the basic premise that marriage should be the only possible outlet available to women for expression of their sexuality.

While suggesting through her ambiguous ending that such a limitation should not be the rule, Brontë does not seem to pose any other viable alternatives in Villette, because Lucy's happiness and sense of fulfillment toward the end of the novel clearly emanate from her anticipation of marriage to M. Paul. The prospect of fulfilled love inspires her in her daily life while her fiancé is away, and gives her the strength to lead an independent existence running her school. While she is indeed happy on her own and in her occupation with her pupils, the reader cannot help but question whether she would have had the vitality to pursue her independence had it not been for the

emotional support of being assured of M. Paul's love.

Emily Brontë also uses physical hunger to emphasize the full implications of the metaphorical hunger she presents in Wuthering Heights. Hunger functions indiscriminately as a means of expression for both of the sexes in this novel. Of course, one can say that as the creation of a female writer, Heathcliff becomes something of a "feminized" male character, and both of Brontë's characters have a romanticized, almost mythic aura about them. Yet their vitality and power make Catherine and Heathcliff somehow believable, and it is the intense level of energy in their hunger which makes it so interesting to examine.

Gilbert and Gubar refer to Catherine's hunger strike as a sort of "anorexia nervosa," because she is desperate to find a means of expressing the powerlessness she feels at being torn between Edgar and Heathcliff:

The masochism of [Catherine's] surrender to ...suicide is plain...from Catherine's own words and actions....But of course, taken together, self-starvation or anorexia nervosa, masochism, and suicide form a complex of psychoneurotic symptoms that is almost classically associated with female feelings of powerlessness and rage. Certainly the 'hunger strike' is a traditional tool of the powerless, as the history of the feminist movement...will attest. Anorexia nervosa, moreover, is a sort of mad corollary of the self-starvation that may be a sane strategy for survival. Clinically associated with 'a distorted concept of body size'--like Catherine Earnshaw's alienated/familiar image in the mirror--it is fed by the 'false sense of power that the faster derives from her starvation,' and is associated, psychologists speculate, with 'a struggle for control, for a sense of identity, competence, and effectiveness.'

(284-5)

Catherine's hunger strike is prompted by the tremendous quarrel she has with Edgar after Heathcliff returns from his travels and visits the Grange. In the course of their argument, Edgar presents her with an ultimatum: "'Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be my friend and his at the same time; and I absolutely require to know which you choose'" (118). The extent of Catherine's feelings of powerlessness in the face of such an impossible choice is obvious in her answer: "'I require to be let alone!' exclaimed Catherine, furiously. 'I demand it! Don't you see I can scarcely stand? Edgar, you--you leave me!'" (118). These exchanges are followed by a violent fit of temper, in which Catherine grinds her teeth and dashes her head against the arm of a sofa, and then locks herself in her room and refuses to eat for three days.

Of this hunger strike, Nelly says that Catherine "fasted pertinaciously," and feels that she is simply being stubborn in her desire to "frighten" Edgar (119). However, Catherine's refusal to eat represents the only means within her limited power for communicating her intense feelings of anger and frustration. Her protest against Edgar's demand that she choose between Heathcliff and himself is projected into the self-inflicted wound of her starvation. Furthermore, she carries this protest to the limits of its power of expression because when she opens her door and eats again after three days, she believes that she is dying. She then eats her food "eagerly" and asks what Edgar has been

doing, to which Nelly answers that he has spent his time among his books:

I should not have spoken so, if I had known her true condition, but I could not get rid of the notion that she acted a part of her disorder.

'Among his books!' she cried, confounded. 'And I dying! I on the brink of the grave!.... Cannot you inform him that it is in frightful earnest? Nelly, if it be not too late, as soon as I learn how he feels, I'll chose between these two--either to starve, at once, that would be no punishment unless he had a heart-- or to recover and leave the country....Is he actually so utterly indifferent for my life?'

'Why, ma'am,' I answered, 'the master has no idea of your being deranged; and, of course, he does not fear that you will let yourself die of hunger.' (121)

Catherine's belief that she is dying, and that she will do so on purpose if Edgar does not respond to her the way she wants him to, reflects her intense desire to empower herself in some tangible way. If Edgar requires her to make such a painful choice, she wants to have the power to require him to endure an equal amount of pain. The extremity of powerlessness Catherine feels in this situation is revealed in her rephrasing of Edgar's demand into what it means for her metaphorically: to make a choice between Heathcliff and Edgar is really to choose between two kinds of death. But Catherine is able to exercise a form of power in changing the nature of the choice. Edgar demands that she choose between two men. Catherine determines to choose either death or absence, and she wants to choose the one of these which will hurt Edgar the most.

Nelly's remark in the above passage once again points to the

recurring association in much fiction of the Victorian period between Catherine's impulsive, suicidal wish to starve herself and madness. Nelly's assumption upon hearing that Catherine is truly intent upon letting herself die of hunger is that she is "deranged" in some way. Like Jemima, the maid in Wollstonecraft's Maria, the servant Nelly also believes that Catherine's "disorder" is temporary, and that when she "comes to her senses" she will eat again.

Heathcliff is perceived by the other characters in Wuthering Heights to be an insane fiend; and, accordingly, his hunger appears limitless. Throughout the novel, Heathcliff wants everything; he hungers for power over his enemies, their land and money, he hungers to destroy them; and, of course, he never gets over his hunger for Catherine. The sense of hunger as an extended metaphor for any intense, involuntary longing in Wuthering Heights adds urgency to Catherine and Heathcliff's love, and inflames Heathcliff's passion for revenge. Yet immediately before Heathcliff dies, he is weakened and ill and believes he is being haunted by Catherine. Whereas Catherine refuses to eat on purpose, and considers deliberately starving herself to death, Heathcliff also starves himself, but says that it is "not his fault." In the scene in which Nelly tries to get him to eat something, there are clear parallels to her earlier experience with Catherine's refusal to eat:

I vainly reminded him of his protracted abstinence from food; if he stirred to touch anything in compliance with my entreaties, if he stretched his hand out to get a piece of

bread, his fingers clenched, before they reached it, and remained on the table, forgetful of their aim....

'The way you've passed these three last days might knock up a Titan. Do take some food, and some repose. You need only look at yourself in a glass to see how you require both. Your cheeks are hollow, and your eyes blood-shot, like a person starving with hunger, and going blind with loss of sleep.'

'It is not my fault, that I cannot eat or rest,' he replied. 'I assure you it is through no settled designs.' (407-8)

Here the hunger metaphor is emphatically extended from Catherine to Heathcliff, to show the incredible power of their passion and longing for one another. Just as Catherine refused to eat for three days, and was frightened by her own reflection in the mirror in the earlier starvation episode, here Heathcliff has been unable to eat for three days, and Nelly tries to get him to look at his own emaciated reflection in the glass. The implication of these insistent parallels seems to be that passion is potentially equally dangerous for both sexes. In much the same way that Charlotte Brontë insists upon a certain equality of the sexes through the unconventional nature of Jane and Rochester's marriage, Emily Brontë seems to be upholding this conviction in her portrayal of the two lovers as equally susceptible to being haunted and destroyed by passion.

Emily Brontë creates a situation in which her heroine is unable to survive, torn as she is between Heathcliff and Edgar. Catherine has committed herself to a refined, reserved code of behavior through her marriage to Edgar. Yet the wild, passionate side of her nature, represented by her relationship with

Heathcliff, is never completely stifled. Because she refuses to give Heathcliff up, it is Catherine's passion (and her inability to express this passion) which ultimately destroys her.

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, on the other hand, is not destroyed by her passionate nature precisely because she learns to control and temper her emotions as Catherine never does. Jane's passions also lead her to contemplate suicide, but she is able to recognize this thought pattern for what it is--an impulsive and irrational emotional response. For example, when Jane is imprisoned in the red-room, she feels great anger, certainly, at the injustices she has received, but she also comes to feel a childish form of despair: "Resolve...instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression--as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die" (47). Jane contemplates this rash resolution while "all my brain was in tumult, and all my heart in insurrection!" (47). Her passionate anger and fierce sense of injustice spark her desire for an equally passionate response. This isolated incident seems to function primarily as a childish burst of anger which eventually cools.

However, in another sense Jane does intentionally attempt to starve herself when she leaves Rochester. She encounters destitution and starvation because her sense of morality has led to her decision, based on her own free will, to flee from Thornfield. She loves Rochester, and longs to stay with him, but

her own moral development forbids such a course of action. While lying on the heath the first night after leaving Thornfield, Jane's thoughts remain with Rochester: "a sad heart...demanded him with ceaseless longing; and, impotent as a bird with both wings broken, it still quivered its shattered pinions in vain attempts to seek him" (350). Here the image of impotence may function at least in part to foreshadow Rochester's maiming and subsequent loss of power, which serves to put him on a more equal footing with Jane. More significantly, however, this image indicates Jane's own sense of powerlessness in the face of her strong emotions. She feels that she must submit and bow down to her strict sense of morality, in spite of her equally forceful passion for Rochester.

The extent of Jane's feeling of impotence is made apparent in her again turning to fleeting thoughts of suicide. She takes some comfort in praying for Rochester and is able to sleep, yet in the morning, she is painfully reminded of her immediate, worldly wants. She then voices an explicit longing for death:

Hopeless of the future, I wished but this--that my Maker had that night thought good to require my soul of me while I slept; and that this weary frame, absolved by death from further conflict with fate, had now but to decay quietly, and mingle in peace with the soil of this wilderness. (351)

While Jane's suicidal desire again appears to be an isolated one, and she later feels agony at the thought of dying (because while Mr. Rochester is alive, she also wants to live) it at the same time does embody the emotional conflict Jane has undergone. She

loves Rochester intensely and wants nothing more than to be able to stay with him. Yet her moral nature demands the social equality provided by marriage (Jane's earlier extreme discomfort at Rochester's lavish gifts and fierce sense of possession while they are engaged reveal the extent of her fundamental need for equality). Essentially, Jane would rather die than become Rochester's mistress, and she would rather live in misery away from him than die, because while she believes him to be alive, "to die of want and cold is a fate to which nature cannot submit passively" (356). These two sides of her nature pull Jane in opposite directions, but her decision to leave Rochester rather than become his mistress reveals her ability to subordinate passion to her moral convictions.

When Jane is recovering in the Rivers' home, the language used to describe her situation echoes the way in which Lucy's hunger and eating in Villette reflect her emotional state: "I had eaten with relish: the food was good--void of the feverish flavour which had hitherto poisoned what I had swallowed" (366). Much as Lucy's "tasting" of Dr. John's letters also signifies emotional nourishment for her, Jane's being able to eat "good" food after her ordeal symbolizes her new situation of being independent and learning "with relish" to earn a living for herself. Her earlier feeling that feverishness had "poisoned" her food is indicative of the situation she has left--that of being dependent on Rochester in a manner incompatible with her sense of morality--which would have engendered a poisoned state

of mind. In this sense, Brontë seems to equate morality with starvation. Jane's moral nature forces her to starve herself of affection when it is presented in the form of becoming Rochester's mistress. It is ultimately Jane's ability to make her passions subject to her sense of morality which guards her from the kind of insanity Rochester's first wife Bertha represents.

Jane's self-imposed starvation thus represents mental strength rather than weakness, and is formed not from a reactive emotional outburst but from real moral distinctions. Matthew Lewis explores the obverse of this relationship between morality and sanity in The Monk. Much as Jane's moral nature preserves her sanity, the deterioration of Ambrosio's morality leads directly to his insanity. The uncontrolled sexuality of Brontë's genuinely "mad" woman Bertha (who will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter) makes her monstrous in appearance and bestial in behavior. Similarly, Ambrosio's unrepressed sexuality turns him into a monster of indulged passions, which eventually escalate into murder.

Matthew Lewis is yet another author who employs hunger as an explicit metaphor for sexual desire. He takes this same parallel one step further than either of the Brontës by using physical hunger and starvation as a direct punishment for one of his character's sexual transgressions. In the subplot detailing Raymond and Agnes' love, Agnes is forbidden to marry by her family due to their superstitious belief in a family curse. She

and Raymond fall in love, but when she believes that he has betrayed her, she enters a convent in accordance with her family's wishes. There he again meets with her, in secret, to explain his earlier apparent desertion of her, and their love is rekindled. The degree of the lovers' passion is emphasized in order to justify the all-consuming nature it assumes for them. When giving in to their passion leads to Agnes' pregnancy, she and Raymond plot to obtain a dispensation from her vows and to secure her escape from the convent. Her secret is discovered before they are able to realize their plan, however, and the Prioress wreaks her cruel punishment on Agnes. She has Agnes drugged (making her believe she is drinking poison) and tells the other nuns, as well as her family, that she is dead. She then condemns her to solitary confinement in the dungeons below the abbey.

When Agnes wakes, she knows herself to be in the burial vaults, and reflects upon her situation:

...I concluded, that being to all appearance dead I had received the rites of burial; and that deprived of the power of making my existence known, it would be my fate to expire of hunger....My long abstinence from food now began to torment me. The tortures which hunger inflicted on me, were the most painful and insupportable....Suddenly a neighboring Tomb caught my eye: A Basket stood upon it, which till then I had not observed....How eagerly did I seize the Basket, on finding it to contain a loaf of coarse bread and a small bottle of water.

I threw myself with avidity upon these humble aliments. They had to all appearance been placed in the Vault for several days; The bread was hard, and the water tainted; Yet never did I taste food to me so delicious.

(404-5)

The Prioress is cruel in her enforcement of Agnes' unnatural punishment. She is outraged to an inhuman extent, and there is no hope of placating her. She has no sympathy for Agnes' plight, nor for the baby Agnes is expecting, of whom she says: "Better that the Wretch should perish than live: Begotten in perjury, incontinence, and pollution, It cannot fail to prove a Prodigy of vice....Expect no mercy from me either for yourself, or Brat" (410). This idea of a connection between pollution and sexuality is yet another common parallel in several of the novels being discussed. Here the tainted water Agnes must drink and the Prioress' conception of Agnes' illegitimate child as polluted are both symbolic of the prevalent view in Victorian culture that sexuality necessarily makes a woman impure.

Although it is not her intention to starve Agnes to death, but to give her "just enough to keep together body and soul," the Prioress considers Agnes' physical hunger and suffering to be an appropriate form of punishment for the sin which she has committed. In direct reprobation for breaking her vows through the satisfaction of her sexual appetite, Agnes is being denied "food...sufficient for the indulgence of appetite." Her physical hunger is meant to serve as an atonement for the indulgence of her sexual appetite, but the Prioress is completely unrelenting in her punishment; she ultimately intends to leave Agnes to pine away in agony until she finally does die.

This theme of starvation in the subplot serves to

counterbalance Ambrosio's actions in the main plot. He, in stark contrast to Agnes' sufferings, gradually gives reign to his sexual appetite, until finally it is utterly uncontrollable. Ambrosio is first persuaded to break his vows of celibacy by Matilda, who poses as a novice in order to gain admission to the monastery. She wins Ambrosio's friendship as the youthful Rosario, then reveals herself to be a woman, declaring her love for him, and convinces him to commit his "crime":

He clasped her to his breast with redoubled ardour. No longer repressed by the sense of shame, He gave a loose to his intemperate appetites....

He no longer reflected with shame upon his incontinence, or dreaded the vengeance of offended heaven. His only fear was, lest Death should rob him of enjoyments, for which his long Fast had only given a keener edge to his appetite. (224-5)

Here Lewis makes an insistent connection between Ambrosio's vows of celibacy, which Matilda elsewhere terms "unnatural," and the idea of abstinence from food. His insistence that the monk's "fast had only given a keener edge to his appetite" reiterates the contrast found in Agnes' situation. She had indulged her sexual appetite once, and as punishment, was being forced to "fast," deprived of both physical and sexual nourishment.

Once Ambrosio takes the initial step in succumbing to his sexual desires, his passions escalate and his utter depravity becomes inevitable. He quickly becomes bored with his sexual encounters with Matilda and hungers after more appealing fare with which to satisfy his voracious sexual appetite. He turns his attentions to his beautiful and pious young confessant,

Antonia, but despairs of finding the means of fulfilling his longing for her. To his surprise, Matilda offers to help him achieve his goal. She cites her absolute love for him as her reason for assisting him in obtaining another woman, but as the reader will learn, Matilda is actually a demon working for Satan, and therefore has a vested interest in Ambrosio's downfall. She gives him a magical branch of silver myrtle, by means of which he is able to enter Antonia's bedchamber undetected. He casts a spell so that she will sleep soundly, and then stands over her, gazing lustfully at her reclining form:

He remained for some moments devouring those charms with his eyes, which soon were to be subjected to his ill-regulated passions. Her mouth half-opened seemed to solicit a kiss: He bent over her; he joined his lips to hers, and drew in the fragrance of her breath with rapture. This momentary pleasure increased his longing for still greater. His desires were raised to that frantic height, by which Brutes are agitated. (300-301)

In this passage, Lewis again equates Ambrosio's sexual desires and his means of fulfilling them with physical hunger and the process of satisfying the appetite through the act of eating. The monk first "devours" the sight of Antonia's nakedness and physical beauty. The description of the kiss, in which he "drew in the fragrance of her breath," also connotes his "devouring" of her in order to satisfy his appetite. He feeds on her breath in order to satisfy the cravings of his sexual appetite for her, and he feels "rapture" upon receiving this bit of "food." But, the kiss serves to sharpen his sexual appetite, and his desire to devour the rest of her is increased by this small "taste."

In the case presented in The Monk, unregulated passions are shown to be the cause of Ambrosio's "insanity," and his gluttony of his sexual appetite develops into a state of frenzied, passionate madness. The connection between uncontrolled passion and insanity in The Monk takes on the flavor of an anticlimactic "moral." Ambrosio's downfall and his being tortured and destroyed by the devil, with whom he has bargained in order to satisfy his lust for Antonia, are supposed to serve as punishment. However, the generally scandalized Victorian audience viewed this reproof as too little, too late. The monk has committed such heinous crimes that it becomes impossible for any amount of punishment to suffice.

Starvation and excessive satisfaction of the appetite are presented as opposite extremes in these novels, both of which are seen as potentially dangerous. While the novels discussed above may not fully concur with each other on the appropriateness of insanity as a punishment for either extreme of sexual behavior, they all do share the conviction that there is an explicit connection to be made between either starvation or gluttony and insanity.

Chapter III

A Madwoman For Every Room in the House: Puerperal Mania, Depression, Schizophrenia and Various Other Forms of Mental Illness

This chapter focuses on the wide variety of mental illnesses described in the novels being discussed. While it is difficult to categorize the types of madness in these novels systematically, and one must keep in mind the almost entirely subjective nature of diagnosing insanity in the eighteenth century, they do fall into distinct groups. Brontë's Bertha and Lewis's Monk are savagely deranged, their insanity characterized by lewdness and intemperate passions. Bertha becomes hideous and deformed, and prone to violence. She fails in her attempt to burn Rochester in his bed, but Ambrosio's mad violence results in repeated crimes of passion, including incest (albeit unwitting), and murder. Lady Audley is said to be suffering from a form of postpartum mental illness, or "puerperal mania." Her madness also leads her to attempt to murder her first husband. Miss Havisham's illness is perhaps the most difficult to define. She exhibits a drastic withdrawal into herself which signifies depression. Both of Charlotte Brontë's heroines suffer from acute depression, which Brontë refers to as "hypochondria." Lucy Snowe also experiences symptoms of schizophrenia, her illness most likely being brought on by her sense of isolation.

Catherine Linton's fit of madness resembles schizophrenia as well because her sense of being torn between two selves causes her to lose touch with reality.

Charlotte Brontë leaves no doubt as to the mental state of her madwoman in Jane Eyre. Bertha Mason, like Lady Audley, is the victim of a mental infirmity inherited from her mother. Bertha represents the opposite extreme from insanity caused by the repression of sexuality, however. She embodies the most frightening possibilities of sexual passion which is allowed unrestrained expression. After her marriage to Rochester, Bertha is described as "'intemperate and unchaste,' a monster of sexual appetite who finally is pronounced mad by 'medical men'" (Showalter 67). She is condemned by her husband and the rest of society for her excess of sexual passion, and Brontë's treatment of her is equally uncharitable. She is portrayed as a hideously deformed, groveling and snarling creature, who is incapable of interacting in human society and therefore needs to be locked away. Some feminist critics have argued that Bertha also represents a second self for Jane, as if Brontë had split her heroine "into two selves, the 'monstrous,' passionate, sexual woman, and the 'good,' rational, controlled woman" (Stein 127). This reading of the function of Bertha's character will be given more attention later in this chapter.

As noted in Chapter II, Lewis comments that Ambrosio's "desires were raised to that frantic height, by which Brutes are agitated" (300). He thus equates the monk's fulfillment of the

unregulated longings of his sexual appetite with bestial behavior. As Ambrosio is "tearing off his garments" in order to rape Antonia, her mother enters the chamber and discovers him there. In his shame and fear, he impulsively strangles Elvira as she is calling for help. He later drugs and kidnaps Antonia in order to satisfy the desire he had been prevented from fulfilling by her interruption. Again in a desperate moment of fear of discovery, this time by members of the Inquisition, he murders Antonia. The escalation of Ambrosio's passion becomes increasingly more uncontrollable with each new incident in which he gives in to it. His sexual appetite, when given the reign he gradually allows it, manifests itself in the crimes of rape and repeated murder. Lewis illustrates through the violence of Ambrosio's actions the consequences of allowing sexual appetites unregulated control of the individual.

Mary Braddon sensationalizes the idea that social conventions which repress women's self expression result in their mental illness in Lady Audley's Secret. Lady Audley's "insanity" is characterized by the attempt to assert her needs and wants to the extreme of committing crimes in order to protect the social position and wealth she has gained. As Showalter explains the condition, Braddon's heroine Lucy "presents a subversive feminist view of puerperal mania and its murderous results" (71). After her husband leaves her to seek his fortune in a foreign country, Lucy despairs of his return and decides to leave their child with her father to seek a governess position, in an effort to

alleviate their poverty. Showalter characterizes Lucy's subsequent acceptance of her employer Sir Michael Audley's advantageous offer of marriage not as an intentional act of bigamy, but as an expression of the desire to "free herself from the confinement of drudgery, maternity, and poverty" (72). Lucy's response when her newly acquired wealth and position are threatened by the reappearance of her first husband is attempted murder and blackmail. Ultimately confronted with evidence of these crimes, Lady Audley reveals her terrible "secret," that she has inherited her mother's insanity. When an official arrives to arrest her, Lady Audley exclaims, "You have conquered--A MAD WOMAN!" (345) She then explains that the latent illness showed itself in response to her depression and bitterness over her situation when her husband left her:

I did not love the child, for he had been left a burden upon my hands. The hereditary taint that was in my blood had never until this time showed itself by any one sign or token; but at this time I became subject to fits of violence and despair...for the first time I crossed that invisible line which separates reason from madness. (353)

It is interesting to note that here again the idea of impurity being transferred to a child through the mother's blood crops up. The blood of Lucy's mother, a madwoman, is considered poisoned in some way, much as Agnes' sexuality was thought to pollute her baby.

Showalter points out that Braddon's novel "suggests that the psychiatric discourse on female insanity obscured many more profound tensions in women's lives" (72). She further questions

whether the "secret [is] that 'insanity' is simply the label society attaches to female assertion, ambition, self-interest, and outrage" (72). In other words, Lucy is not actually insane, but because she chooses to "[defend] herself through violent attacks on men" (72), rather than to conform to the passivity traditionally expected of women, she is labelled by society as insane, and is even socialized into believing herself that her behavior constitutes insanity.

The solution to Lucy's criminality in Lady Audley's Secret is to quietly send her off to a lunatic asylum rather than stain the family name with scandal. As discussed earlier, Braddon sets up the situation by informing the reader that Lucy's mother was "insane," and Lucy's own behavior can be read as an expression of puerperal mania. Alternatively, this reading could be discarded in light of the frequent use of "insanity" by men to get "troublesome" women out of the way. For example, Anthea Trodd insists that within the novel, "Nobody...gives any credence to the theory of insanity for Lady Audley, least of all the doctor who commits her after arguing that her behavior was entirely logical for a woman in her position" (116). Whether or not the reader actually believes Lady Audley to be insane, however, Braddon does succeed in calling into question women's traditionally passive, even helpless, role in society. Lady Audley shows determination and courage in acting in her own best interests throughout the novel, because she realizes that no one else will. But again, the character's downfall lies in excess.

Like Ambrosio, Lady Audley is willing to commit crime in order to ensure the fulfillment of her desires.

In Great Expectations, Miss Havisham's repression in terms of both sexual and emotional love manifests itself in a profound mental imbalance. Pip's first description of her is prefaced by informing the reader that she is "the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see" (40). Her ghost-like appearance and their first meeting confirm this impression:

'Look at me,' said Miss Havisham. 'You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?'

I regret to state that I was not afraid of telling the enormous lie comprehended in the answer 'No.'

'Do you know what I touch here?' she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.

'Yes, ma'am....Your heart.'

'Broken!'

She uttered the word with an eager look, and with a strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it....

'I sometimes have sick fancies,' she went on, 'and I have a sick fancy that I want to see some play. There, there!' with an impatient movement of the fingers of her right hand; 'play, play, play!' (41)

This is Miss Havisham in a nutshell; a strange old lady with sick fancies. She is abandoned by her professed lover, thereby deprived of the usual manner in which women were able to express their sexuality: through marriage. Her behavior after this disappointment amounts to a perversion of her wedding vows. She is faithful to her intended husband in her hatred for him, just as she would have been expected to be faithful to him in love if they had actually gotten married. She lives in her wedding

dress, which is falling apart with age, and leaves everything as it was in expectation of her marriage until she dies; just as, if she had been married, she would have been pledged to her husband until death.

Miss Havisham further expresses the frustration and anger brought about by the repression of her own natural desires by a vicious type of revenge. As an extension of the resentment and hatred she feels for men, Miss Havisham's views of family life are also distorted. Although she claims she loves Estella and is astonished when the young lady cannot return her affection, she herself has raised Estella to be cold. She originally has in mind the idea of protecting Estella from the pain she herself endured, but the principles she uses in raising Estella essentially teach her how not to love. Instead of nourishing the child with love, which would also have been therapeutic to her own broken heart, Miss Havisham teaches Estella to be completely independent emotionally. Miss Havisham's prolonged inability to express either sexual or emotional love for others leads to her unhealthy mental state, because after Compeyson's perfidy becomes apparent she decides that she is ill (afflicted by a broken heart), and promptly cuts herself off from the outside world. After several years of indulging in her own "sick fancies" and self-fashioned unreal environment, her intense bitterness develops into a mental imbalance that is deep-seated and irreversible. In the process of insisting that she is sick and shutting herself in unnaturally, Miss Havisham cultivates a true

illness of the mind.

Estella, on the other hand, is not mentally and emotionally ill in the same sense that Miss Havisham is, but her state of mind is also "unnatural" because she is taught to disregard her sexuality and her natural affections. She is repressed by Miss Havisham's perverted teachings regarding men and love from early childhood, and as a result, she neither expects nor gives love. She is allowed the opportunity for sexual expression which is provided by marriage, but because of the views she has acquired while growing up, marriage is for her simply an emotionally empty, socially accepted (even expected), living arrangement. Her husband is a stupid brute who beats her, but she feels no more or less emotional attachment to him than she does to Pip, who repeatedly pleads with her to accept his love.

Karen F. Stein asserts that "the grossly disfigured Bertha is a monstrous incarnation of the passionate, angry aspects of the self that Jane must subdue in order to escape from a series of prison-like rooms" (128). She extends her reading of Bertha's character to include the full implications of her death for Jane and Rochester's marriage:

Only after Bertha's death, the death of the 'monstrous,' angry, assertive self, is Jane's marriage to Rochester possible. Jane's prospects for matrimonial success are enhanced by Rochester's blindness, a fictional device for placing him in the female position of dependency, thus making the two more nearly equal politically. (Stein 128)

This concern with the equality of the two characters is a central

one in the novel, and is of course highlighted by the disparity in character between Rochester and his first wife. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read the madwoman in the attic's character similarly, viewing Bertha's crazed behavior as an outward manifestation of Jane's subconscious resentment toward the patriarchal structure of her society (360).

John Maynard, on the other hand, argues convincingly that Jane does express her anger outwardly, as in her impassioned speech to Rochester that she is his equal, and has "as much soul...and full as much heart" as he does (281). Therefore, she does not need Bertha to speak for her. Maynard would argue that the ways in which Bertha parallels Jane are meant to show rather than her character speaks to Jane; to warn her about the dangerous nature of passion (126). He comments that even Brontë "admitted that the character was overdone in the punishment visited upon her for her sexual sins" (106-7). His interpretation of Bertha's abstract function in the novel focuses rather on the way in which she embodies her society's worst fears about sexuality:

She seems conceived after the Victorian idea of woman falling, when she falls, into complete sensuality. Her punishment follows the Victorian association between sexual excess and madness, and her mad curses are about the hidden life of the body: 'such language!--no professed harlot ever had a fouler vocabulary than she' (p. 392). Created thus out of Brontë and her culture's fears of sexuality, Bertha functions primarily as a warning exemplum of the dangers of sex. (Maynard 107)

This same "association between sexual excess and madness" was

seen most markedly in Lewis' The Monk. Unlike Lewis, however, Brontë truly punishes her madwoman for her lasciviousness.

While on one level Bertha's madness may suggest the possibility of Rochester's mistreatment of her, the way Brontë presents the situation, the reader's sympathy lies with Rochester; one sees clearly that the burden of a mad wife causes him to feel driven to deceitful means of obtaining Jane as an illegitimate but cherished wife. Brontë does not tell Bertha's whole story, and her treatment of Bertha remains unsympathetic throughout; Bertha is portrayed as less than human, debased as a result of the "illness" caused by her excessive passion.

The reader remembers that Jane herself has likewise experienced isolation as a result of her passionate nature as a child, but unlike Bertha, gradually learns that she must be able to subdue and control this aspect of her personality. It is significant that although marriage appears to be the only socially acceptable expression of passion available to women, Brontë succeeds in subverting the convention to some degree through both the unconventional nature of Jane's marriage, and her insistence on also pointing to the possibilities of danger associated with marriage and sexuality.

Charlotte Brontë uses the term hypochondria "consistently in the traditional sense of a 'morbid state of mind, characterized by general depression, melancholy, or low spirits'" (Maynard 246). This term perhaps most aptly describes Jane's experience in the red-room, as well as her later dreams and fainting spell

when she encounters Bertha in her bedroom. When she has had time to reflect and calm down from her passionate anger in the red-room, (and the room itself has also cooled with the advancing evening), her "hypochondria" sets in: "My habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression, fell damp on the embers of my decaying ire" (48). This state of depression does not lift entirely even after Jane has recovered from her fainting "fit" and is being treated with unwonted kindness as Bessie nurses her.

The circumstances immediately before and after Jane's fainting spell in the red-room are obscured. After she screams and Mrs. Reed orders that she be locked in the room for an hour longer, Jane supposes she "had a species of fit: unconsciousness closed the scene" (50). The next thing she remembers is waking up in her own bed in the nursery. Brontë gives the reader rather cryptic clues as to what may have happened in the meantime. Jane hears the servants Bessie and Sarah whispering together, and catches scraps of their conversation: "'Something passed her, all dressed in white, and vanished'--'A great black dog behind him'--'Three loud raps on the chamber door'--'A light in the churchyard just over his grave'--&c., &c." (52). It is never made clear whether Jane is supposed to have seen these apparitions, whether Mrs. Reed or people in the town have seen them, or whether they are merely rumors concocted by the servants themselves. It seems most likely that Jane would have imagined seeing such sights, and babbled about them in the delirium of her fit of unconsciousness.

The nervous state Jane worked herself into while anticipating a ghostly visit from her uncle in the red-room made her susceptible to just such hallucinations. Her hypochondriacal or depressed condition is such that her "nerves [are] not in a good state," as Mr. Lloyd mumbles aloud when he is called in to attend to her (57). Brontë makes it clear that Jane's hypochondria has reached an advanced stage, because no amount of kind attention from Bessie can cheer her up. She can find no pleasure in things which normally delight her, such as reading Gulliver's Travels and being given a pastry on a china plate with a bird painted on it which she has expressed interest in, but never been allowed to hold before. Such loss of interest in things which usually give pleasure is one of the primary warning symptoms of severe depression (DSM-III).

Jane's physical reaction to seeing a "streak of light" which she fears portends a supernatural visit (but later in life conjectures to have been simply the gleam of a lantern), is one which John Maynard describes as "a kind of sexual overload" (102): "My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated; endurance broke down" (49). Maynard's reading of the entire novel centers around his interpretation of Brontë's unique discourse on sexual awakening, and several of his comments prove relevant to other parts of my discussion. However, as Mr. Lloyd the apothecary later points out, Jane "must be eight or nine years old" at the time of this

incident. Maynard himself warns against "the perils of posthumous analysis" and "plot[ting] out the effects of the Electra conflict" on a character's mind, yet this seems to be precisely what he himself is doing here, and the sexual reading may be stretched too far in this instance (36).

Maynard does argue convincingly about the dreams Jane has during her engagement to Rochester representing "a sufficiently clear emblem of the dangers of sexual awakening to the emotionally overwrought Jane," however (126). He contends that the dreams reenact the fears Jane suffered from during her experience in the red-room. Specifically, when Jane wakes up to see Bertha tearing her wedding veil, she is lying in bed looking at the mirror, in which Bertha's image is reflected. As Maynard points out, no parallel between the women could be made more explicit. In this sense, seeing Bertha in the mirror, Jane is confronted with a double of herself. Thus, as Jane's counterpart, Bertha functions as a self which Jane must overcome in order to marry Rochester. As soon as Bertha is dead, there is room for sexuality in Jane. Yet at the same time, Bertha also functions as an explicit warning to Jane against the extremes of passion. If, as Maynard suggests, Jane is already in the process of experiencing a sexual awakening, then Bertha provides an extreme to be avoided in much the same way that St. John and Helen present opposite extremes, neither one of which Jane can accept for herself.

According to Maxwell, Lucy Snowe's depression is thought to

have come from a profound sense of inadequacy and low self-esteem, resulting in part from her having been deprived of her own family. She is often described by critics as an archetypal "outsider," one who is "defined in terms of who she is not and what she does not possess" (Maxwell 226). Lucy's depression is subsequently self-perpetuated in each of her various situations, which share in common the one constant of her feeling of never quite belonging, no matter where she goes. Her timidity and quiet acquiescence to her position as an outsider further contribute to her inability to alter her depressed psychological state.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar greatly expand upon this theory in their discussion of Villette in The Madwoman in the Attic with the assertion that Lucy suffers from several symptoms of "what amounts to...schizophrenia" (403). In a definition taken from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual II, Kayla Bernheim and Richard Lewine refer to "schizophrenia" as "a chronic disorder in which thinking, feeling, and relating tend to be disturbed in characteristic ways" (8). One of these characteristics is a "split from reality," or a temporary state of psychosis, "in which various aspects of the environment are falsely perceived or interpreted" (9). The schizophrenic's split from reality often involves a "'split'...between the thinking processes and the emotional processes," and can be manifested in such symptoms as hallucinations and paranoid or delusional ideas (9). While the discovery of the nun's clothes in Lucy's bed

after Ginevra has eloped with de Hamel undercuts the certainty of Lucy's having actually had hallucinations, it is important to note that her state of mind in the various situations in which she sees the nun are certainly conducive to hallucinations. Similarly, when Lucy is left alone in the school during the long vacation and becomes ill, in her mind, "the ghostly white beds were turning into spectres--the coronal of each became a death'shead, huge and sun-bleached--dead dreams of an earlier world and mightier race lay frozen in their wide gaping eye-holes" (198). Although "weak and shaking," Lucy claims that she "was not delirious" on this particular evening, yet this is the same night that she collapses in the street. She later remembers nothing of "Where [her] soul went during that swoon," but she does indeed experience delirium then (207).

The foundation for Gilbert and Gubar's theoretical diagnosis of Lucy's condition is "the conflict between restraint and passion, reason and imagination within her" (403). They further argue that Lucy's "schizophrenia" is evidenced by Brontë's use of the other characters in the novel to objectify the dichotomy within her heroine. For example, while "Madame Beck is a symbol of repression, the projection and embodiment of Lucy's commitment to self-control" (408), she represents only one side of Lucy's personality. Similarly, "...it is Ginevra who best embodies Lucy's attraction to self-indulgence and freedom" (409). As Gilbert and Gubar point out, "The split between restraint and indulgence, voyeurism and participation represented in the

contrast between Lucy and Polly is repeated in the antagonism between Madame Beck on the one hand and Desirée, Madame Svini, and Ginevra Fanshawe on the other" (409). The key to an understanding of Lucy's psychological state as schizophrenia is thus the way in which the division between restraint and passion found within her is repeated in the opposition between the personalities of various other female characters.

Emily Brontë's presentation of Catherine and Heathcliff's passion in Wuthering Heights reaches toward this same extreme of a "split from reality." While a diagnosis of "schizophrenia" does not seem to be entirely appropriate here, Catherine's passion does serve to pull her in two opposing directions. The wild, passionate side of her nature is associated with the untamed beauty of the moors and draws her to the "gypsy" Heathcliff. However, once she is introduced to the glitter of society's charming and graceful manners through the window of the Grange, she is fascinated and allured by this "civilized" ideal of life as well. She is unable to choose between the two, and as her innately passionate nature refuses to fully reject either extreme, the impossibility of ever reconciling the two leads to her longing for death as an escape from the warring factions within her. The anguish caused by Catherine's inability to know and act upon what she really wants culminates in her losing touch with reality after her hunger strike. She stares at her reflection in a mirror without recognizing her own face, and becomes agitated to a point which Nelly terms "madness":

Tossing about, she increased her feverish bewilderment to madness, and tore the pillow with her teeth; then raising herself up all burning, desired that I would open the windowBoth the expressions flitting over her face, and the changes of her moods, began to alarm me terribly....A minute previously she was violent; now,...her mind had strayed to other associations. (122)

Catherine's delirium and "feverish bewilderment" are only increased when she strains to look in the mirror. She insists that what she sees is a "face" in the "black press." Nelly tries to make Catherine understand that the face in the mirror is her own, but she refuses to be placated.

Catherine goes on to tell Nelly that she is afraid the room is haunted, and finally Nelly has to cover the mirror with a shawl, being unable to subdue her child-like sense of terror any other way. When Catherine finally seems calmer, she explains to Nelly that she had imagined herself at home in her chamber at Wuthering Heights, and was unable to recall the "whole last seven years" of her life, as if they had never happened. She continues to rave, and demanding that Nelly open the window she exclaims, "I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free...and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed?....I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills" (126). She then walks unsteadily over to the window to open it herself, and Nelly finds that "her delirious strength much surpassed mine (she was delirious, I became convinced by her subsequent actions and ravings)" (126). In the midst of these ravings, which Nelly also refers to as "her

insanity," Edgar enters the chamber and is horrified to see Catherine's deteriorated condition. When Catherine at last recognizes him, she speaks with longing of her imminent death:

I suppose we shall have plenty of lamentations, now...but they can't keep me from my narrow home out yonder--my resting place where I'm bound before Spring is over! There it is, not among the Lintons, mind, under the chapel-roof, but in the open air with a head-stone....What you touch at present, you may have; but my soul will be on that hill-top before you lay hands on me again. I don't want you, Edgar; I'm past wanting you. (128)

Catherine's speech articulates the separation of body from spirit which she anticipates in death. In this "mad scene" she has chosen Heathcliff over Edgar, because she has wished to return to her childhood, when Heathcliff was her "all in all." She envisions a state of perpetual childhood for herself once she is dead and her soul has been freed from her body. Catherine insists on being buried in the open air upon the moors to signify her return to a state of being "half savage and hardy, and free."

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