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## The Ghosts Of Lucy Snowe: Queer Temporality In Villette

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THE GHOSTS OF LUCY SNOWE: QUEER TEMPORALITY IN *VILLETTE*

by

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## ABSTRACT

Though Lucy Snowe has been read as an agent of queer nonconformity and as a master of ambiguity, queer interpretations of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* have remained relatively scarce and limited in scope. This essay examines Lucy Snow's unique model of queer experience that manifests not only in moments of openly subversive gender performance, homoerotic desire, or sexual identity, but also as an oppositional mode of organizing and articulating her life in terms of time. Using the temporally queer metaphor of the ghost, this essay explores Lucy's resistance to frameworks of time which structure life narratives through logics of heterosexual development from childhood to adulthood, solitude to marriage, or marriage to reproduction. Lucy mobilizes the phantasmal as a language for the instability of heteronormative chronological markers, the difficulty of communicating queer experience alongside normative expectations, and finally, as a model through which asynchrony can lead to positive queer affect outside of heterosexual temporal logics. Where Lucy's queerness has chiefly been analyzed through her subversive actions and experiences, this essay posits that investigating Lucy's queer spectrality engages the necessity of conceptualizing queerness as a mode of being in time that offers both deconstructive and constructive ontological possibilities.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps by now commonplace to read Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* as a radical critique of normativity, an interpretation made particularly amenable given the protagonist's confessed love for dramatic shows of transgression, perhaps best illustrated in her cross-dressing Vaudeville stage performance. Indeed, playing a role that she neither wanted nor asked for, Lucy Snowe takes the stage for a distinctly queer performance, wooing a woman while dressed partly as a male fop and partly in her own dress. This scene has come to exemplify Lucy's queer orientation to gender and sexuality, showcasing Lucy's determination to "be arranged in [her] own way" and to subvert heterosexual identity. Given a defined script and place within the marriage plot, Lucy simultaneously recognizes that the role "must be played," and that she has the power to add "yearned-for seasoning" and to "recklessly [alter] the spirit of the *rôle*" (155).

However, though Lucy's queerness, as played out onstage, has received some critical attention, few critics attend to the complexity of Lucy's relationship to her own queer identity, one which, as this essay explores, exceeds open transgressions to include a rich negotiation of queer temporal possibilities that she discovers against, within, and parallel to normative structures. While indeed Lucy finds pleasure in unsettling expectations through her acting, she crucially attempts to hide away her memory of and desire for the queer performance "with the lock of a resolution," outside the reach of

“Time” and “Temptation” (156), doffing her male garments to comfortably disappear in her spectral “gown of shadow” (145). Lucy’s decision to lock away this queer performance, which haunts her with both the memory and the possibility of a “world of delight” (156), marks a key move in her narrative of negotiating queerness as a construction of time. More than just a single flash of queer transgression, Lucy’s experience in the play becomes a history and a potential future that are irreconcilable with the narrative she has constructed for herself as a “mere looker-on at life” (156). This instance of a present sense of self haunted by a queer past and future exemplifies Lucy’s unique model of queer experience, one that manifests not only in moments of openly subversive gender performance, homoerotic desire, or sexual identity, but also as a framework of organizing and articulating her life temporally. Extending beyond individual moments, like those spent upon the stage, queerness for Lucy thus takes the form of ghosts—temporal phenomena that are always out of sync with heteronormative templates of time. Lucy’s narrative makes a clear break from conventional markers of time, distinctly evading a structure of development from childhood to adulthood, courtship to marriage, or marriage to reproduction and complicating each of these “stages” with the haunting presence of ghostly figures. This essay examines Lucy’s engagement of queerness as a spectral experience of time, attending to Lucy’s use of the phantasmal as a language for the instability of heteronormative chronological markers, the difficulty of communicating queer experience alongside normative expectations, and finally, as a model through which asynchrony can lead to positive queer affect outside of heterosexual temporal logics.

This investigation of Charlotte Brontë's engagement with queerness expands on a scant, but significant body of queer criticism of the Brontës' works. Ann Weinstone offers perhaps the most comprehensive examination of "the queerness of Lucy Snowe," highlighting not only the ways in which Lucy engages in a language of homosexual erotics, but also more expansively examining Lucy's "queerness" as enacting the "destabilization of the deployment of heterosexuality as a category that enforces sexual and political norms" (367). Other critics have since explored this notion of Lucy's queer "destabilization," by expanding, revising, and complicating the definition of "queerness" that Weinstone posits. Drawing from Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Katie R. Peel describes Lucy's queerness in terms of transgression against "fixed categories of character and narrator, as well as gender and sexuality" (231). Though she affirms Weinstone's definition of Lucy's queerness as "the dissident's critique of categorization itself" (Weinstone 368), Peel calls for an expansion of the term "queer" to "any practice that challenges the normative, be it the heteronormative or not" (231).

Peel's insistence on an expansion of the term "queer" reflects a now-familiar move in Queer Theory of defining "queerness" as a broadly deconstructive or destabilizing term. As Scott Bravmann instructively writes, "queer means trouble as much as it means gay and lesbian" (20), to which Lee Edelman adds that "queerness can never define an identity; it can only disturb one" (17). "Queerness," then, has popularly become nearly coterminous with "resistance." Yet, as Richard A. Kaye points out, an examination of queerness in the novels of the Brontës requires not only identifying their deconstructive or revolutionary qualities, but also examining, as Leo Bersani does with Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the way in which they "simultaneously enforced



Victorian ideological structures *and* radically questioned them” (Kaye 40, emphasis added).

This effort to read Lucy Snowe’s narrative through a queer lens responds, in part, to the scarcity of queer readings in Brontë criticism and attends to the exigency of, as Kaye puts it, “launch[ing] a ‘queer’ school of Brontë interpretation” (38). Kaye emphasizes that the significance of this new school of interpretation extends beyond a historical understanding of queerness in a Victorian context to impact queer identity for modern readers. Kaye’s criticism points to a crucial need for Brontë criticism to attend to the role of these works within a continued, and continually evolving, history of queer identity formation, which in turn requires examining the multiplicity of queer constructions and orientations within and against normativity.

Discussions of queer temporality are surprisingly scarce in criticism of Brontë’s novels. Though many have discussed *Villette*’s upsetting of generic expectations [e.g. the female Bildungsroman (Breen), the marriage plot (Carens), Gothicism and Victorian Realism (Heady)], few have touched on Lucy’s queer constructions of temporality. “Queerness,” as Carolyn Dinshaw writes, “has a temporal dimension” (4). Not only does queer sexuality involve a non-normative relationship to time, but inversely, Dinshaw argues, “temporal experiences can render you queer” (4). In other words, regardless of one’s sexual or gender identity, queerness involves a state of being “out of sync with the ordinarily linear measurements of everyday life, that engage heterogeneous temporalities or that precipitate out of time altogether” (4) Approaching this question of temporal queerness active in *Villette*, this essay interrogates Lucy’s queering of childhood,

spatializing of queer temporal development, and reshaping of normative conceptions of expectation and futurity.

These elements of Lucy's narrative require an understanding of Victorian queerness that expands beyond homoerotics and gender performance. Lucy's queerness occurs both in her lived experience and in her practices of interpreting her own past, present, and future within and against the templates of normativity. Though Lucy certainly engages in non-normative gender performance and desire, she also constructs a queer identity in the process of interpreting, narrating, and remembering her experiences. In doing so, Lucy constructs a mode of temporality that allows for queer positive affect, uncertainty or nonnarratability, and critical deconstruction while resisting heteronormative temporal logics.

Conceptualizing Lucy's queering of temporality requires first establishing a framework of the normative temporal structures with which she must contend. In her foundational book, *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman expands Dana Luciano's concept of "*Chronobiopolitics*," or "the sexual arrangement of the time of life" (Luciano 9), to include "the use of time to organize human bodies toward maximum productivity" (Freeman 3). Freeman terms this expanded concept of regulated temporal experience "*chrononormativity*," describing this social regulation as a means by which "people are bound to one another, engrouped, made to feel coherently collective, through particular orchestrations of time" (3). Lucy's feelings of isolation, alienation, and "singularity" stem most powerfully from her disconnectedness from these socially binding structures of chrononormativity. Judith Halberstam crucially describes queerness as "an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices,"

emphasizing the potential of queerness to define not only sexual identity, but also an oppositional orientation to time (1).

Key to chrononormativity is the logic of sexual “development” through paradigmatic markers of life experience: “birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (Halberstam 2). Between “birth” and “marriage,” Halberstam adds another normative logic of growth— “the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation” (4). In opposition to this logic, Halberstam describes a counter, queer “epistemology of youth” that “disrupts conventional accounts of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity” through which queer subcultures can “produce alternative temporalities” (2). While Lucy’s antisocial turn of mind prevents her from participating in “queer subcultures,” her narrative crafts a particularly queer formulation of childhood which effects a jarring disruption of the “adult / youth binary” (Halberstam 2).

Lucy’s unsettling of stages permeates her narrative, not merely on the literal stage in a hyper-visible drag performance, but also as she works through a queer way of compiling her life story outside the “stages” of chrononormativity.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE UNCANNY POLLY HOME: QUEERING CHILDHOOD

Lucy disrupts the distinction between the childhood and adulthood by figuring her own childhood through the uncanny figure of Polly Home, whom Lucy describes as unsettlingly uncategorizable as either child or adult. As many have pointed out, Lucy's observations of Polly displace details of Lucy's own childhood. She thus refuses to naturalize childhood as the beginning of her own story, prefacing a transformation into adulthood. Rather, in describing Polly, Lucy characterizes childhood, as Lucie Armit puts it, as an "uncanny and indeterminate space of identification" (218). Memorably, Lucy says of Polly: "When I say *child* I use an inappropriate and un-descriptive term—a term suggesting any picture rather than that of the demure little person in a mourning frock and white chemisette, that might just have fitted a good-sized doll" (19). Little Polly indeed inhabits a strange space between the asexual infant, or even doll, and the sexually mature woman, which renders the word "child" both "inappropriate and un-descriptive." Rather than narrate her own childhood experiences, Lucy dedicates the first section of her story to the study of Polly's indeterminacy as child or adult. Yet, as she struggles to understand, diagnose, or even name Polly's temporal categorization, Lucy emphasizes Polly's queerness, and by doing so, negotiates the queerness present in the history of her own youth.

The queerness with which Lucy grapples when narrating Polly's and her own childhood hyperbolically exemplifies Katherine Stockton's definition of childhood as

inherently “queer,” given that even the non-homosexual child’s categorization as “not-yet-straight,” or “approaching the official destination of straight couplehood” renders the child “estranged from what it ‘should’ approach” (283). As Stockton notes, normative society refuses to acknowledge the existence of the “homosexual child” because it is a category “deemed too adult, since it is sexual” (283). And yet, she remarks, “to refuse a child this designation actually reveals our culture’s contradictions over childhood sexual orientation: the tendency to treat all children as straight while we culturally consider them asexual” (283).

This simultaneous mapping of sexuality and innocence onto the body of the child becomes, in Lucy’s descriptions of Polly, haunting. Polly obsesses over her relationships to both her father and to Graham Bretton, Lucy’s god brother, performing in her devotion to these male figures the role of a sexually mature woman. Weinstone remarks that Polly plays out the drama of “heterosexual ritual” in her relationship to Graham and her father (370). Though Graham sees Polly as a child, his interactions with her carry sexual implications, as when he has her “pay” for a picture of a spaniel with a kiss (23) or when he suggestively assures her that “I am going to be a favourite: preferred before papa soon, I dare say” (21). Though Graham recognizes sexual boundaries that he should not cross with Polly, dismissing her reverence for him as like that of a “little sister” (33), he courts her attractions, allowing moments of intimacy that Lucy suggests are transgressive. When Polly reaches out to “[gather] Graham in her little arms, drawing his long-tressed head towards her,” Lucy notes that “The action, I remember, struck me as strangely rash; exciting the feeling one might experience on seeing an animal dangerous by nature, and but half-tamed by art, too heedlessly fondled” (33). Lucy adds that she does not fear

physical harm for Polly's sake, but worries that Polly opens herself to harsh rejection, a repulse from having crossed the sexual boundaries Graham acknowledges by defensively claiming Polly as a "sister." The tension Lucy notices, or perhaps constructs, around Polly's adoration for Graham reflect the tension Stockton indicates between the prescribed "pre-heterosexuality" and "asexuality" of children.

Lucy lingers over moments during which the duties assigned to grown women become absurdly or even violently inappropriate for Polly's small body to perform. While Polly serves food to her father and Graham, Lucy observes that "the sugar-tongs were too wide for one of her hands, and she had to use both in wielding them; the weight of the silver cream-ewer, the bread and butter plates, the very cup and saucer tasked her insufficient strength and dexterity; but she would lift this, hand that, and luckily contrived through it all to break nothing" (18), and while Lucy depicts the scene as disturbing, Polly's father "seemed perfectly content to let her wait on him, and even wonderfully soothed by her offices"(18).

Lucy describes a scene even more troubling and suggestive in Polly's recurring needlework on the "scarlet-speckled handkerchief" which she "intended as a keepsake for 'papa'" (22). What would be a mundane activity for an older girl or adult woman becomes a bloody, violent scene as Polly tries to hem the handkerchief, "at which she bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself over and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots" all the while remaining "silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly" (19). Mirroring the strawberry-embroidered handkerchief that becomes a sign of sexual transgression in *Othello* or the bridal sheets that signify the loss of virginity, the image of the bloody handkerchief itself

carries disconcertingly sexual implications, magnified by Lucy's fixation on the stabbing action of the "skewer" with which she "pricks" herself over and over" or her "diligent" and "womanly" demeanor" as she ignores the pain (19).

Weinstone marks the entrance of Polly Home as "the beginning of a period of deadly combat with compulsory heterosexuality" in which "Lucy must resist the physical and mental takeover which is woman's lot" (370). Indeed, Lucy notes with disdain that Polly's devotion for the men in her life consumes her identity, remarking that "One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now that her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham, and seemed to feel by his feelings; to exist in his existence" (Brontë 29).

Weinstone argues that "In order to resist, [Lucy] opposes herself to the child, describing herself as plain, cold, calm, and coolly observing in contrast to Polly, who is fanatic, sensitive, dangerous, and passionate. In posing herself to us in this way, Lucy performs *the person she must be* in order to escape Polly's fate" ( 370-371 original emphasis).

Katie Peel conversely argues that Lucy "as narrator is making Polly perform Lucyness," allowing herself to use Polly as "an object for Lucy's own concerns about herself" (234).

Yet while the idea of Lucy identifying *with* Polly seems diametrically opposed to her identification *against* Polly, I argue that Lucy holds these two attitudes towards Polly in suspension, using Polly as a site through which to evaluate and determine her own orientation towards heterosexual development, which is neither normative nor fully dissident.

The final scene of this section of Lucy's narrative ends on a moment of intimacy between Lucy and Polly—a tender moment that stands out against the tension Lucy

carefully accentuates in their previous interactions. When Polly learns that she will leave soon and be separated from Graham, Lucy describes Polly openly sharing her feelings in “that trenchant manner she usually employed in speaking to me; and which was quite different from that she used with Mrs. Bretton, and different again from the one dedicated to Graham” (35). Despite professing surprise or bemusement at Polly’s willingness to show “her eccentricities regardlessly before me – for whom she professed scarcely the semblance of affection” when she withholds even a “glimpse of her inner self” from her godmother (36), the openness and self-expression she allows herself to share with Lucy indicate a more intimate, positive relationship than Lucy admits.

The little figure whom Lucy describes as haunting every space she inhabits (15), characterized as both an asexual doll-like infant and an “old and unearthly,” sexually mature, desiring woman (15), becomes, as Peel explores, a figure through which Lucy imagines both her own childhood and her own futurity. In the telling final moment with young Polly, Lucy invites her into her own bed, “wishing, yet scarcely hoping, that she would comply: for she was a most strange, capricious, little creature, and especially whimsical with me. She came, however, instantly, like a small ghost gliding over the carpet” (38). Holding Polly in her arms, Lucy considers the strangeness of the girl and projects her own concerns about the dangers and unpredictability of the future onto her: “A very unique child,’ thought I...’How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason tell me are prepared for all flesh” (38). Polly, whose queer asynchrony has up to this point been a “curious spectacle,” (16) through which Lucy detachedly explores the contradictory, complex, and queer overlapping



constructions of childhood and sexuality, stands in for her own childhood and, in this moment of intimacy, becomes the figure through which she gives voice to her expectations and fears for the future. Rather than considering what the future will hold for Lucy herself as a young woman, Lucy imagines the future as a series of “shocks and repulses” that would overwhelm Polly, who stands in for “all flesh.” Notably, by considering the uncertainties of her own future through Polly, she does not imagine inhabiting the future as an adult, but as a queer woman-child, a figure who takes on the expectations prescribed for adulthood, but for whom those duties never quite fit. Even as this figure enters Lucy’s embrace as a figuration for the past and future self, she haunts, “like a small ghost,” as “strange, capricious, little...and especially whimsical” as she was at the beginning of Lucy’s tale (38).

The strangeness and ghostliness that Lucy attributes to Polly reflects the indeterminacy of Lucy’s relationship to her own queer history. Calling into question the chrononormative concept of childhood as a discrete and fully-past category, Lucy renders Polly as spectral, prone to shifting across time, queerly connecting past to present. The figure of the ghost, then, which Lucy both fears and inhabits, offers an apt metaphor for Lucy’s queer temporal experience.

## CHAPTER 3

### SPECTRAL TIME: THE GHOST AS A METAPHOR FOR QUEER TEMPORALITY

Just as Polly signifies the haunting queerness of Lucy's childhood and her early conceptions of futurity, the time and space of Lucy's narrative continue to be queered in ghostly ways. By no coincidence, Lucy moves from a preoccupation with one spectral figure to another as she leaves the uncanny Polly behind and enters the domain of the ghostly nun. Lucy continually returns to spectrality, ghostly figures, haunting and being haunted as she gives language to her story, suggesting that her experience of time requires a metaphor that can accommodate a complex relationship to time, one that violates chrononormative logic.

Ghosts and haunting have long been associated with describing and understanding queerness, both homophobically as a ghoulish threat, "waiting to pounce upon some unexpected innocents" (Freccero 77), and more sympathetically as a symbol of deconstruction, particularly as the term has gained popularity in post-structuralist theoretical contexts. Jacques Derrida's term "hauntology" uses the figure of the ghost to disrupt ontological binaries of presence and absence, life and death, visibility and invisibility. As Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren observe, Derrida's re-vision of the ghost destabilizes "the formation of knowledge itself" and "specifically invokes what is placed outside it, excluded from perception and, consequently, from both the archive as the depository of the sanctioned, acknowledged past and politics as the (re)imagined

present and future” (Blanco and Peeren 9). The ghost, then, disrupts time by presenting a subjectivity that cannot (and yet, must) be reconciled to preconceived categories of knowledge. This element of temporal and ontological disruption, as Freccero and others have pointed out, makes the ghost distinctly queer.

Carla Freccero takes up Derrida’s call to recognize the ghost as a moral imperative, describing a “willingness to be haunted” as an “ethical” mode of historicism “motivated by a concern not only for the past but also for the future, for those who live on in the borderlands without a home” (75). Posed opposite to the “urge to identify, and thus stabilize, the meaning of an event and a person” (74), Freccero suggests that recognizing the instability and uncategorizability of the ghost might allow for a future less bounded by the categories which make the ghost an impossible figure. Yet, as Terry Castle argues, spectrality is not always a source of power for queerness. Where Freccero sees the political potential for the living to be haunted by the specters of the past, Castle points to a long history of “ghosting” that has relegated queerness, particularly for women, to the position of the invisible, the ephemeral, and the phantasmal.

Freccero’s and Castle’s use of the ghost metaphor to describe the elusiveness of queer histories fittingly illustrates the significance of spectrality to Lucy’s narrative. In addition to destabilizing chrononormative categories, a haunting and haunted conception of time captures the uncertainty of Lucy’s ability or willingness to convey her past. As Ahmet Süner points out, despite being “the novel’s protagonist, heroine, and first-person narrator,” Lucy oscillates between presence and absence, occupying “almost a spectral presence” in her own story (315).

One of the few scholars to directly examine spectrality in *Villette*, Süner reads Lucy's in-between-ness as the core drama of the story, focusing on Lucy's search for a space that can accommodate her ghostly form, as she "strives to inhabit and represent the meandering complexities of a life that is never fully present or fully absent" (339). Gretchen Braun further sees Lucy's oscillating presence and absence within her own story as "a narrative of psychic and social placelessness and dislocation" (Braun 189). Braun uses trauma to understand Lucy's "silences, repetitions, and obfuscations" as a way of communicating "experiences and perspectives generally considered 'nonnarratable'" (190). Mirroring Süner's reading of Lucy's hauntedness, Braun describes traumatic experience as entailing "unwilled returns of the affects and/or physical sensations of loss or threat, which constitute unsuccessful but persistent attempts to comprehend it" (Braun 190). In other words, Lucy attempts to reconcile a traumatic past with a construction of her present identity through her narrative, but in order to incorporate the "nonnarratable" into the story of herself, she employs disappearances, mystifications, and uncanny returns. Though neither identifies queerness as a source for Lucy's vacillation between presence and absence, or the ghostly returns that both haunt and inhabit her, Süner's and Braun's spectral approaches to Lucy's narrative outline a fitting model for Lucy's configuration of queerness in time and space.

The haunting placelessness and nonnarratability that Braun and Süner examine point to the ghostly absences, silences, and failures inherent in non-normative orientations to language and time. Queerness, like trauma, creates what Cathy Caruth terms an "impossible history" (5). Indeed, where Braun attributes Lucy's inability or refusal to narrate stretches of her life to the haunting effect of trauma and loss, such

haunting may as aptly be attributed to the “nonnarratability” of a queer history within a system of language dominated by heteronormativity. The difference, as Dominick LaCapra has explained, is located in the difference between “loss” and “absence,” where “losses are specific and involve particular events” and “absences” indicate a “trahistorical” or systemic condition (700-701). Though Lucy’s story no doubt involves trauma, suffering, and personal loss, these experiences are deeply entrenched with her queer relationship to time, and her spectral approach to dealing with them suggests that a systemic absence in social and cultural language, not just personal loss, causes her to struggle to articulate those experiences.

What Süner identifies as Lucy’s haunting, then, pinpoints a conceptual and temporal, rather than physical, placelessness among the social structures she navigates. Lucy haunts her own story because her past exceeds chrononormative methods of expressing and comprehending histories.

## CHAPTER 4

### GHOSTS AND THE ARCHIVE: QUEERING NARRATIVES

Lucy makes her deviation from heteronormative linearity explicit when she narrates her experience at the picture-gallery. From the start, Lucy recognizes the experience of browsing the gallery as a space for the performance and enforcement of temporal narratives, roles, and expectations. She explains that the typical experience of examining the artworks among company requires a show of “orthodox” admiration, indicating that fulfilling the role of the “educated adult” or even the “well-reared child” requires performing attentiveness to the “correct” representations of history and knowledge, or the “lions of public interest” (222).

In addition to depicting the celebrated public figures and scenes of history, the gallery showcases models of proper life narratives, and, as M. Paul Emanuel demonstrates, there are implicit codes that enforce each visitor’s orientation to those models. M. Paul insists that the sexually suggestive “Cleopatra,” for instance, should only be seen by men and married women, signifying that female eroticism should only be accessible to women after they have fulfilled heterosexual marriage. M. Paul determines, based on Lucy’s age, gender, and marital status, that she should limit her gaze to “*La vie d’une femme*,” or “The life of a woman,” a series of paintings meant to portray four stages of a woman’s life, including the “Jeune Fille [Young Girl],” the “Mariée [Wife],” the “Jeune Mère [Young Mother],” and the “Veuve [Widow]” (225). Closely paralleling

Halberstam's four chrononormative markers of life—birth, marriage, reproduction, and death—the paintings epitomize the temporal narrative assigned to women.

If the museum, then, acts as an archive of authoritative time, Lucy's method of solitary browsing rejects a passive, appreciative attitude towards those structures and opts instead for a spectral approach. Like Jeffery Andrew Weinstock's concept of the "phantom," Lucy introduces "epistemological uncertainty and the potential emergence of a different story and a competing history" (63) into this archive of accepted public histories and expectations. She resists M. Paul's supervision in favor of an unaccompanied experience spent, "not always in admiring, but in examining, questioning, and forming conclusions" (222).

Lucy thus gives "*La vie d'une femme*" her criticism rather than her admiration, labelling the women in the paintings as "flat, dead, pale and formal" (223). Yet, ironically, from her spectral position outside the known and acknowledged bounds of normative womanhood, she names the four "Angeles" as "cold and vapid as ghosts" (226). Standing before these figures, Lucy is both haunted and the one who haunts. She is haunted in the sense that Derrida introduces when he writes that the "the archive is *spectral*" ("Archive Fever" 54). The series of women in the paintings serve as Derrida's "specter...by whom we feel ourselves watched, observed, surveyed, as if by the law," the "wholly other" that makes demands "without any possible symmetry, without reciprocity" ("Spectrographies" 40). These women haunt Lucy in that they represent the spectral presence-absence that the categories of normative womanhood have in Lucy's life. They are, as Lucy laments, both "insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities" and "women" that she must "live with" (226).

Yet, rather than passively yielding to the spectral demands of the painted women, Lucy embraces her own ghostly position, destabilizing the scene of the gallery-archive and the heteronormativity it espouses. Addressing the reader, Lucy casts a probing look at the scene of the Cleopatra and her onlookers. In doing so, she violates the bounds of her assigned position as a young, unmarried woman in the gallery, but she also casts doubt on the temporal categories that M. Paul endorses. Notably, as she turns her gaze from the paintings to the spectators, she lingers on Colonel de Hamal and muses on his feminine qualities—his “high-polished little pate,” his “trim and natty” figure, his “womanish feet and hands,” and his general daintiness—and his contrasting fixation on the extravagant sexuality and “dusk and portly” otherness of the Cleopatra (229). Lucy undermines M. Paul’s logic that, for men, including de Hamal, looking at the Cleopatra fits functionally into a productive heterosexual timeline. On top of calling attention to de Hamal’s effeminacy, Lucy also highlights the Cleopatra’s masculine qualities and her blatant unproductivity, remarking on her “wealth of muscle,” her potential to “do the work of two plain cooks,” and her contradictory leisurely posture, arguing that the Cleopatra has “no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa” given her health and strength (223).

Lucy’s criticisms of de Hamal and the Cleopatra suggest that, despite M. Paul’s implication that this eroticism fits well within the chrononormative logic of heterosexual marriage and reproduction, the sexual desire of a feminine man for a “gipsy-giantess” (226) neither fulfills nor aids any such purpose. Though her descriptions of these instances of otherness are anything but accepting, Lucy renders this scene of erotic spectatorship, which M. Paul categorizes as a “quite proper” heterosexual rite within the



limits of sexual propriety (involving only men and married women) (226), into a scene of rampant queerness. By emphasizing the queerness of this dynamic, Lucy implies that if de Hamal's lust for the Cleopatra fits within an authorized heterosexual narrative, the boundaries of such a narrative are already permeable and unstable.

Lucy's suspicions about the queerness of de Hamal appear to be paradoxically both confirmed and explained away when Lucy reveals that the ghostly nun, who according to legend returns to haunt the pensionnat because she was "buried alive, for some sin against her vow" (117-118), was really de Hamal in disguise all along. Though the nun initially defies explanation and threatens to unsettle rational categories, Lucy's revelation fulfills a chrononormative trope of resolving the uncertainty and potentially destabilizing force of the ghost within the realm of acceptable narratives. Besides dismissing the potential threat to known scientific laws, unveiling the nun also removes the threat of transgressive desire that she poses against heterosexual marriage. Lucy's revelation that the nun actually serves as a vehicle to facilitate heterosexual courtship ostensibly delegitimizes interpretations of the nun, like that offered by Sharon Marcus, as symbolic of Lucy's repressed queer desire (Marcus 25).

Yet, though Lucy finds out that the nun's garments concealed a heterosexual male lover all along, the fact that a feminine male fop cross-dressing as a stern, religious woman haunts an unfeminine, stern, religious woman who cross-dresses as a fop, both to woo the same woman, renders the situation no less queer. Between the two performances of heterosexual courtship and their haunting interrelation, the neat explanation that such a heterosexual rite lies behind the mystery appears far less stable than the "perfectly natural solution" (452) that Lucy hopes to discover. If de Hamal supposedly stands in for

normativity that supplants and dismisses the queerness of the ghost, Lucy's narrative suggests that normativity itself continues to be haunted by the queerness it cannot fully contain. Lucy's move to allow the nun to occupy both a mysterious, haunting role and a rationalized but markedly queer one reflects an impulse to explain away the queer ghost and to repeatedly be haunted by the queerness that exceeds explanation.

Lucy's relationship to the ghostly nun serves as an apt figure for her negotiation between the presence and absence of a queer history. Just as she allows the nun to simultaneously exist in her narrative both as a rational phenomenon *and* as a destabilizing, queer figure, she likewise presents her own past as a ghostly presence-absence. In reference to the passage of time between her youth and her adulthood, Lucy says,

It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! The amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbor still as glass (39).

Many have pointed to the possibilities opened by the uncertainty in Lucy's language. Some, like Braun, maintain that tentatively hinting toward a happy alternative to trauma only conceals what Lucy cannot or will not relate. Others, like Peel, argue that the scene opens the narrative to radical reader agency, offering both the traumatic and the idyllic as valid options, depending on whether one plays the role of the "sympathetic" or the "critical" reader. Yet, though Lucy offers the two possibilities side by side, she suggests that the two options are neither equally likely nor mutually discrete. Rather, Lucy

highlights the difference between normative expectations—that which will “of course” be “conjectured”—and the queer, non-narratable excess that Lucy both shrouds and challenges the reader to recognize in its spectral uncertainty.

Though the image of Lucy basking in the sunlight, enjoying an acceptable middle-class adolescence, may not adequately represent her experience, it is not an irrelevant façade. She presents this vision as an object of desire and of safety, dubious as it may be. Despite clearly insinuating the inaccuracy of the idyllic metaphor, Lucy defends the image, saying “A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest? Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft” (39). She thus suggests the reader imagine her as undifferentiated from a vision of how “a great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives.” While Braun compellingly suggests that this metaphorical device allows Lucy to cope with and find language for trauma, Lucy also uses this imagery both to mask and to articulate the temporal queerness of memories that are incompatible with the way “women and girls are supposed to” live. Her phrasing of this image as a conclusion readers can “safely” draw while doing “no harm” further suggests, not that this assumption will not change the narrative much, but rather that Lucy will be the “safer” for being perceived by the reader as conforming to normative expectations.

Lucy does not precisely aim for a successful deception—every critic of *Villette* has acknowledged at least the ambiguity of her telling—but, rather, she seems to be negotiating between a version of her past that aligns with conventional expectations and the queer, painful reality that defies language. Her use of the phrase “many women and

girls *are supposed to* pass their lives” could mean that these women and girls are obligated by social convention to live this way or it could mean that they *supposedly* live their lives this way, casting doubt on whether they actually do. Allowing both meanings to operate at the core of this vision places Lucy in the position of both affirming and undermining, desiring and mocking a temporal norm of stability and comfort.

As with the ghostly nun, Lucy allows an interpretation of her “impossible history” (Caruth 5) that aligns with generic and social paradigms, but she maintains the spectral presence-absence of a queer history that exceeds the story she tells but that she cannot or will not articulate.

## CHAPTER 5

### INHERITING THE GHOST: RESISTING GENERATIONAL LOGIC

Lucy's ghostly disconnection in time complicates her access to history and futurity, leaving her with both a queer absence of language to articulate her orientation to time and a queer absence of material connections to past and future generations. Despite the physicality of her ghostly past, it is neither material nor property. Rather, it is both present and absent, both physical and ethereal. The ghostly formulation of time stands in opposition to a chrononormative logic of inheritance, in which generation gives way to generation, connecting the past to the future through reproduction, property, and bloodlines. As Halberstam puts it, "the time of inheritance refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next. It also connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of the familial and national stability" (5).

Lucy has a keen awareness of normative attitudes toward inheritance. In contrast to the elusive (non)description of her own financial and familial situation, she discusses in some detail not only the fortunes but also the hereditary legacy left to Graham and Polly. Lucy's first words explain that Graham's birthplace shares his last name and that, relatedly, his family had lived there "for generations" (7). She mentions also that, in addition to a "handsome property" (40), he "inherited the lines of his mother's features" and "her good teeth, her stature...and, what was better, her health without flaw, and her

spirits of that tone and equality which are better than a fortune to the possessor” (8). Yet, where Lucy highlights Graham’s financial and hereditary inheritance, she mentions almost nothing of her own.

Adding to her refusal to discuss her history in terms of generational inheritance, Lucy also refuses to frame her experience of futurity in terms of heterosexual temporal markers. Lucy actively suppresses expectations of future wealth, marriage, or happiness: though she admits to having “wished to see” balls and operas, for instance, she emphasizes that “it was not the wish of one who hopes to partake in a pleasure if she could only reach it...it was no yearning to attain, no hunger to taste; only the calm desire to look on a new thing” (120). Instead of viewing an opera or a ball chrononormatively, as a future-oriented occasion to attain a husband or make social connections, Lucy resists allowing her desires to take the temporal dimension of hope, expectation, or “yearning to attain.” Lucy instead imagines her desire to attend a ball as an opportunity to experience visual pleasure in the present—a “new thing” to look upon and add to her map of experience.

Thus, though she may long for the comfort or sense of belonging available to her contemporaries through generational time, Lucy does not describe her experience of time generationally through reproduction or the inheritance of property. Rather, Lucy engages with past and future in the form of ghosts. Following from Blanco and Peeren’s description of the spectral as an “unmooring from defined points of departure, notions of linear progress, and fixed destinations” (32), Lucy’s haunted and haunting conception of history and futurity resists temporal logics that bind her past, present, and future to a fixed narrative of heteronormative “progress.”

Yet, while she resists normative categories of generational time, Lucy's spectral temporality presents an alternative model of inheritance which, like her relationship to the archive and the reader, can be figured through the metaphor of the ghostly collapse of time and space. Rather than receiving a chrononormative inheritance, one that originates from an older familial generation and contributes to a logic of financial accumulation, Lucy receives a queer and spectral bequest from the markedly queer and spectral Miss Marchmont.

On the night before she dies suddenly, Miss Marchmont demonstrates a method of accessing pleasure in conjuring the ghostly presence-absence of memory and futurity in a profoundly present dimension. In a moment of sudden "excitement of spirits and change of mood" later revealed as "the prelude of a fit" that ends her life (47), Miss Marchmont rouses Lucy to tell her that she feels "so strong, so well...I feel young to-night...young, light-hearted and happy" (43). She expresses optimism and hope for a future that she will never realize, exclaiming, "What if my complaint be about to take a turn, and I am yet destined to enjoy health? It would be a miracle!" (43). Yet, in this moment of exuberance, her thoughts turn from hopes of living futurity to a celebration of past and recollection. "I love Memory to-night," she says, "I prize her as my best friend. She is just now giving me a deep delight; she is bringing back to my heart, in warm and beautiful life, realities – not mere empty ideas...I possess just now the hours, the thoughts, the hopes of my youth" (44).

In this peculiar moment, Miss Marchmont describes a spectral orientation to time, in which her past appears within her present, but in contrast to the alienating effect such a haunting typically has for Lucy, Miss Marchmont demonstrates a queer, spectral

experience of time that allows for positive affect. “Memory,” which Miss Marchmont personifies as her “best friend,” allows her to “possess” the hours, the thoughts, the hopes of [her] youth. The word “possess” carries the double meaning of having a thing within one’s grasp and also of being able to physically or spiritually inhabit it. In other words, Memory either bestows upon her a ghost which she can perceive physically or gives her the ability to spectrally inhabit the past. She describes scenes suddenly fresh in her memory: “While I lived, and while I was loved, what an existence I enjoyed! What a glorious year I can recall – how bright it comes back to me! What a living spring – what a warm, glad summer – what soft moonlight, silvering the autumn evenings – what strength of hope under the ice-bound waters and frost-hoar fields of that year’s winter! Through that year my heart lived with Frank’s heart” (44). In this imagined memory, every season of the year prior to the misery of her lover’s death collapses into a moment of visual splendor that alleviates the pain of “an existence so long fretted by affliction” (47). Her memory, then, allows her a uniquely present, even ethereally physical, connection to her past that grants her neither monetary value nor a generational legacy. The significance of this moment escapes chrononormative logic entirely, as she accesses the time of her life through a spectrally non-linear experience.

As Weinstone examines, Miss Marchmont occupies “the outermost zone of the matrix” (371), inhabiting a non-normative mode of temporality. Her fiancé died just before her marriage, leaving her an isolated and independently wealthy “maiden” (40), a term, in contrast to the term “spinster,” generally reserved for young unmarried girls. With her proclamation “I feel young to-night,” Miss Marchmont espouses what Halberstam refers to as the “epistemology of youth” through which she can “produce



alternative temporalities” by believing in a future that “can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (Halberstam 2). She imagines herself as enjoying a happiness in Memory that grants her value which other women do not experience: “if few women have suffered as I did in his loss,” she claims, “few have enjoyed what I did in his love” (46). Her final act is to instruct Lucy that “We should accept our own lot whatever it be, and try to render happy that of others” and promises to “begin by trying to make you happy. I will endeavor to do something for you, Lucy: something that will benefit you when I am dead” (46). Most readers assume that this means that Miss Marchmont intends to leave Lucy with a fortune, a financial inheritance that will craft a quasi-generational bond between the two. Yet, Lucy takes away a different kind of inheritance, one through which she accesses a new kind of futurity, but that lacks financial or normative cultural value. Instead, Miss Marchmont passes to Lucy a methodology by which to encounter memory and futurity in the present, to use her memory as a way of reparatively engaging with her history by mapping out a (narrative) space for the positive experiences of her past so that she can cope with the uncertainties and traumas she has experienced in a distinctly queer temporal mode.

Miss Marchmont’s method of spatializing time again invokes the conceptual metaphor of haunting, but while this ghostliness does serve a deconstructive function in exceeding and subverting normative categories of inheritance and same-sex relationships, it also presents Lucy with the possibility of experiencing pleasure in allowing herself to be queerly haunted. Rather than being unsettled by the ghostly presence of queerness, Miss Marchmont models a way of summoning ghosts consistent with Freccero’s

description of a haunting's potential to be "a profoundly erotic experience, one that ranges from an acute visual pleasure to mystical *jouissance*" (91) and, further, as a means to "survivals and pleasures that have little to do with normative understandings of biological reproduction" (80). If being haunted can serve as a metaphor for interpreting history with an openness to queer possibilities, as Freccero suggests, Miss Marchmont suggests that this experience can simultaneously be a means of finding comfort and emotional sustenance in the way that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick outlines in her definition of "reparative reading."

Like Sedgwick's "reparatively positioned reader," Miss Marchmont looks to the past to "organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates" in order to "entertain...profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities" as a way of coping with the isolation, trauma, and oppression of being politically and socially marginalized (146). Yet, where Sedgwick's reparative reader reads for queer possibilities by imagining that "the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did" (146), Miss Marchmont posits a method of engaging memory to experience the present differently, wherein even the throes of death can offer the pleasures of optimistic youthfulness. She does not regret the loss of her fiancé as a failure to fulfill a heteronormative life narrative but instead rejoices in her ability to experience continued intense love for the ghost of her youth. She thus interprets her past, not as a tale of progress (or failed progress) leading teleologically to her death, but as an ever-present source of pleasure which can coexist with a queer life experience—a ghost through which queer positive affect outweighs the negative affect of oppressive normativity.

## CHAPTER 6

### SPATIALIZING TIME: THE GHOST AND THE GARDEN

Though Lucy struggles through pain and hopelessness to settle into a temporal identity, Miss Marchmont's instructive mode of spatializing Memory appears in several moments that, in a novel riddled with absences, offer a profound sense of presence upon which Lucy dwells and in which she finds comfort. This spatial mapping of time, accommodating the ghostly presence of past and future, consistently reappears as Lucy calls on memory for comfort. In the brief passage in which she directly mentions her childhood, she offers a spatial metaphor through which to imagine her experience of time before Polly's arrival or the calamity of her adolescence. "Time," she says, "flowed smoothly for me at my godmother's side; not with tumultuous swiftness, but blandly, like the gliding of a full river through a plain...with 'green trees on each bank, and meadows beautified with lilies all the year round.'" Lucy stresses the a-temporality of this scene, remarking that "The charm of variety there was not, nor the excitement of incident; but I liked peace so well, and sought stimulus so little, that when the latter came I almost felt it a disturbance, and wished rather it had still held aloof" (Brontë 8). Though in this scene time manifests as a constantly flowing stream, in experiencing it, Lucy can remain peacefully still. Counter to the chrononormative logic often symbolized by seasonal cycles—where spring stands in for fertility and reproduction, summer for youth, autumn for old age, and winter for death—Lucy characterizes life in this metaphorical space as

having “beautified lilies all the year round.” Eschewing reproduction, aging, and death, Lucy’s imagined garden espouses a queer epistemology of unending youth.

If this space signifies the Edenic innocence of Lucy’s youth, Miss Marchmont’s method of accessing memory in the present allows Lucy to enact a queer reversal of the fall. Counter to the binary of innocence and experience that makes the narrative of the fall a permanent transition, Lucy is able to re-enter the garden of her youth, most strikingly when she makes a personal refuge of “l’allée défendue,” or “the forbidden path.” In describing her alley, Lucy draws attention to the queerness of this “carefully shunned” space and the queer comfort that it provides her, explaining that:

For a long time the fear of seeming singular scared me away; but by degrees, as people became accustomed to me and my habits, and to such shades of peculiarity as were engrained in my nature – shades, certainly not striking enough to interest, and perhaps not prominent enough to offend, but born in and with me, and no more to be parted with than my identity – by slow degrees I became a frequenter of this strait and narrow path. I made myself gardener of some tintless flowers that grew between its closely-ranked shrubs; I cleared away the relics of past autumns, choking up a rustic seat at the far end. (119)

Not only does this garden recall the peacefulness with which she describes her happiness with Mrs. Bretton, it provides her with a protected feminine space that reflects her own shadowy, ghostlike identity. Described as “strait and narrow,” protected from the “penetration” of the sun’s rays, and as populated by “tintless flowers” (119), the alley allows her to comfortably disappear. Whereas she appears “singular” to the women of the Pensionnat, in the alley, Lucy creates a space where she blends in and feels at one with

her surroundings. Only when she finally embraces her queerness, or “shades of peculiarity,” Lucy is able to access memories of her childhood as a ghostly presence:

A moon was in the sky, not a full moon but a young crescent. I saw her through a space in the boughs over-head. She and the stars, visible beside her, were no strangers where all else was strange: my childhood knew them. I had seen that golden sign with the dark globe in its curve leaning back on azure, beside an old thorn at the top of an old field, in Old England, in long past days, just as now leaned back beside a stately spire in this continental capital (120).

Here, she accesses her childhood within the present through the physical figure of the “young moon”—a figure of development that is cyclical, marking time not by a logic of “progress,” but by angles and shadows, the seen and unseen. Miss Marchmont’s logic of memory, youth, and hopefulness as sources of positive queer affect grant Lucy comfort in a space wherein she can map her position in time in all its complexity.

Of course, Lucy’s alley does not fully escape the “penetration” of inquiring eyes. As M. Paul later reveals, both he and Madame Beck secretly “watched her well” from the start (404). M. Paul even admits to using a spyglass to examine her movements in the dark (405). Yet, in spite of this hyper-surveillance, Lucy’s queerness escapes notice. Madame Beck never finds proof for the offense that she watches for, and M. Paul implies that his vigil is motivated by romantic interest in Lucy and that he watches for a visible indiscretion that would disqualify her as a candidate for marriage (404).

The true queerness of Lucy’s time in the alley escapes the scrutiny of both spectators because it does not fit within the logic of their searches. In stark contrast to her queer performance in the Vaudeville play, Lucy shows no discernible sign of

transgression in her alley. Nevertheless, like Miss Marchmont in her final moments, Lucy quietly subverts chrononormative logic through her queer experience of time. As with Lucy's portrayal of Polly's uncanny sexuality, Lucy's ability to re-enter the garden undermines the chrononormative logic of childhood as a discrete stage of purity from which the adult transitions permanently into sexual maturity. Yet, while both scenarios deconstruct a progress-oriented logic of history, this new figuration allows Lucy to use queer spectral temporality as a shelter rather than merely as a deconstructive weapon. If young Polly represents the tension between queerness and normativity that Lucy must encounter in the act of remembering, Lucy's Marchmontian, spectral experience in this space demonstrates an alternative mode of remembering that brings her pleasure without adhering to chrononormative systems of value.

## CHAPTER 7

### POSSESSING MEMORY

The final scene, another famous for its ambiguity, also notably recalls Miss Marchmont's experience of clarity and memory. Just as Lucy appears to be reoriented into a normative temporal scheme of marital closure, a final storm leaves the fate of Lucy's fiancé, M. Paul, unresolved. Though she builds suspense, insinuating that the "destroying angel of tempest" sinks M. Paul's ship (546), Lucy refuses to narrate whether he lives or dies. Again she requires the reader to fill in the blanks, offering the normative "fruition of return," resulting in "union and a happy succeeding life," as an alternative for readers with a "quiet, kind heart" or a "sunny imagination" (546).

Yet, though Lucy poses this imagined ending to her story as an opportunity to "conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror" (546), Lucy, like Miss Marchmont in her final moments, does not dwell on the pain of the trauma half-hidden by the "sunny" version of events. Rather, she lingeringly remembers the optimistic experiences of preparing her home and school while awaiting his return. She describes this time of waiting as "the three happiest years of my life" (543). Acknowledging the dissonance of this preference in a chrononormative marriage plot, she remarks, "Do you scout the paradox? Listen" (543). She recognizes that her focus on the pleasure she experienced, and re-experiences in remembering, apart from her fiancé contradicts a timeline that happily resolves in marriage. She thus challenges the reader to "Listen" to

her way of telling her story—to allow the paradox to exist in its spectral impossibility, to allow the coexistence of normative expectation and queer affect.

In these last moments, without setting aside the expectations of the marriage plot, Lucy emphasizes the paradoxical pleasures of the time of anticipation as she enacts her ability to cause a “Happy hour” of the past to “stay one moment” and “bequeath its cheer to that time which needs a ray in retrospect” (538). As though the events of the final scene are happening in the present moment, Lucy tells the reader “M. Emanuel’s return is fixed...My school flourishes, my house is ready...I have cultivated out of love for him (I was naturally no florist) the plants he preferred, and some of them are yet in bloom. I loved him when he went away; I love him now in another degree; he is more my own” (545). Recalling the flowers of her childhood garden and l’allée défendue, the house gives a spatial dimension to her queer experience of time. Much as she was able to access the pleasures of her childhood in the present when visiting the alleyway garden, Lucy connects this moment of asynchronous pleasure to the present moment of narration, made even more immediate by Lucy’s employment of present tense.

Lucy’s description of the intensified love she feels in this moment stands in tension with the implied impending death of her fiancé. Lucy’s refusal to narrate either death or reunification in the final scene allows her to remain queer. An ending that happily reunited Lucy with M. Paul would resolve her prior asynchronies into momentary detours on the teleological path to marital bliss. Narrating M. Paul’s death would solidify her final moment of untimely happiness as a false hope. Lucy instead concludes her narrative with a Marchmontian focus on the presence of memory that brings her comfort and joy. By omitting marriage and tragedy from her account, Lucy allows herself to



celebrate the love she felt in solitude and anticipation without plotting that experience on a chrononormative timeline. Her queerness occurs not merely in the unfulfilled marriage plot, but in the freedom that she creates in her narrative to experience pleasure and pain without subordinating those experiences to heterosexual logics.

Scott Bravmann instructively writes that “the importance of history to gay men and lesbians goes beyond the lessons to be learned from the events of the past to include the meanings generated through retellings of those events and the agency those meanings carry in the present” (4). While the queerness of Lucy’s sexual and gender identity remains in question, her queer orientation to normative temporal logics renders her narration a telling example of what Bravmann calls “historical self-representations” or “queer fictions of the past” that serve as a platform on which to “help construct, maintain, and contest identities” or “queer fictions of the present” (4). For Bravmann, by presenting the past as a site of evaluation and identity-formation, a space in which queerness might be negotiated and celebrated through the reparative function of memory, these fictional narratives might allow the “formation of new social subjects and new cultural possibilities” (4). Lucy’s spectral narrative continues to offer valuable insight for the negotiation of queer identity as Brontë challenges readers to recognize queerness as an unfixed, perpetually haunted orientation to time, offering in its resistance to chrononormativity both added difficulties and opportunities. Vilette crucially offers a historical perspective that engages queerness not only as a marginalized or oppositional identity, but as a framework that opens both constructive and deconstructive “cultural possibilities” for approaching and experiencing the past, present, and future.

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