

Articles

The Male Gaze and Masochism: The Construction and Penetration of the Phantom

Automaton in Jane Eyre and Villette

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Many Victorian classics have been read within the vein of approaching the “Woman Question” of the time period. That is to say, Victorian authors were concerned with the idea of women's economic, social, and political liberation. More than this, I would suggest that Victorian reflections on women’s issues, identities, and changing social roles in fact prefigured some of the questions and concerns that contemporary fiction takes up today in relation to posthumanism and the broader question of “being human.” The Victorian woman was one of the key and most important figures in the early discourses of posthumanism. Victorian literature uncovers the embodiment of what it is to be a human-like subject who is somehow less than, inferior, or objectified (disassembled) into various parts and sensations for the use and pleasure of others.

Many authors before me have explored a similar connection. William Cohen in his work *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (2009) argues that it is through the senses that Victorians tackle the question of what it means to be human. Cohen states that “sense perception enables embodied subjects to experience themselves as objects, and objects reciprocally to function as subjects, so as permit a mutual perviousness between self and world” (Cohen 6). Cohen rightly points out the use of the body as a central site for the experience of humanness. But what Cohen overlooks in his analysis of the Victorian senses is how this framing of humanness can be extended in specific relation to the Victorian “woman question” as an early formulation of today’s posthumanism. This project seeks to extend Cohen’s examination of the senses through the lens

of the posthuman to include and disassemble women characters in Victorian Literature as the original site of an ongoing investigation into what it means to be human.

In her work *The Victorians and Visual Imagination* (2000), Kate Flint is concerned with the Victorians' interest in how the senses paved the way for new modes of perceiving the world around them. Flint outlines the various technology, psychology, and art influenced how non-material aspects of being human became prevalent in Victorian culture:

Victorians ways of seeing, in broad terms, were both modelled upon and effectively legitimated by, certain dominant physiologists, and of natural scientists, whose work with the microscope in particular provided an endless source of comments filtering into popular culture about how the invisible could be brought to view, and how knowledge and control over the natural world could be thus be obtained. (8)

Flint is concerned with how Victorians deepened their understanding of the human experience through the new discoveries of the time period. However, Flint does not extend her argument to consider how these Victorian scientific advancements have implemented gender bias that continue into modernity. Megan Ward in her book *Seeming Human* (2018) explores the idea of contemporary rhetoric being applied to Victorian novels. Her work divulges that characters in Victorian realism can be read as representations of automated intelligence (AI) (2). Ward is particularly interested in how these characters behave as scripted, programmed subjects similar to modern representations of AI. But what Ward overlooks is how Victorian sensationalism is both at the heart of AI and Victorian characters. Ward addresses how the Victorian mind portrays these characters as AI, whereas this project looks at the physicality of the gendered body as the center of both its social construction and its disassembly.

This project focuses on the set of sensory, affective, and embodied phenomena Victorians associated with the emergent genre of sensation and the complicated relation sensation has always had with realism. I will say more about these genres below. For now, it is worth clarifying that when I say “senses” I mean what is generally concerned with how it feels to be human, especially in terms of sight, sound, touch, and inner affective feeling. The essence of humanness is not just something ethereal or vague but a set of affects, drives, and social relations (being seen, being felt, being recognized by others as well as oneself) that has material properties. Humanness is not located internally in the body or psyche but can be observed and felt on and in the body at the level of touch, sight, and contact. How humanness can be observed in the literary world is through the representation of emotions, feelings, and actions of characters within literary works. The body itself becomes the narrative, social, and epistemological center for defining and interrogating humanness. Through the body’s senses subjectivity is not just about the soul or the mind, but rather the physicality of being human. It is through the senses that subjectivity is challenged and becomes undone. Subjectivity is not bound by the ethereal but includes the fleshy existence of humans. Having the body as the center of human experience allows for a closer examination of what makes a subject. This disassembly of subjectivity is not bound by the material but becomes porous, taking on new meanings of what it entails to be human. I am not only concerned with subjectivity, but how the social construction of gender affects that subjectivity. “The Woman Question” is not just centered on the individual woman but on the social depiction of their interactions with others. We see that the Victorians not only question the economic, political, and social roles of women, but what womanhood and humanity mean such that one can contend “a woman is a human.” The Woman Question raised in sensational and realist novels retains an emphasis on feeling, sight, and touch that in this way disassembles the human.

To solidify the connection between the Posthuman and the Victorian, I turn to Thomas Huxley's 1879 article titled, "On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata," which describes how the mind works. Writings from the era suggest that Victorians had acute anxieties about the human mind and human subjectivity in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Suzy Anger points out that Huxley's theory that "humans are conscious automata" had a "profound hold on the Victorian cultural imagination" (50). The idea of conscious automata was born out of the industrial revolution and the production of machinery to perform tasks brought into question the relationship between the mind and the physicality of human actions. Huxley interrogates the idea of how the mind and the body act in ways that have no "motive" and even goes so far to compare humans to "machinery" (Anger 51). As Anger also points out, Huxley's article was a summarization of cultural ideas that had been accepted by Victorian society for many (51). Huxley theorizes that human impulsiveness leads to the mind being more akin to machinery. Huxley's argument rests on the idea that human "consciousness" plays little role in the actions of humans. Instead, he surmises that "reflexes," devoid of emotion, account for human actions, thus making conscious actions harder to define. Huxley articulates the comparison of the machine to human action, stating "as the steam-whistle which accompanies the work of a locomotive engine is without influence upon its machinery" (50). The knowledge that the comparison between machine and human action was relevant to the Victorians plays an integral role in my analysis. However, I complicate this comparison by bringing in the concept of gender and how gender may play a role in the automaton we see in Brontë's work.

Posthuman theories often presume the self-evident asexuality or liberated, post-gender queerness of AI. For example, in her now famous "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), Donna Haraway asserts that "the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-

oedipal symbiosis, un-alienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts in a higher unity” (2). Haraway explains that cyborgs do not have a gender and are in fact part of the world free from the confines of the male and female, ultimately blurring gender dichotomies. However, Haraway’s statement is ambiguous and warrants unpacking and perhaps pushing back against. This article asks if it is really possible for new technologies to exist outside of the sex/gender structure.

Judith Butler in her analysis of gender in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (1991) offers another approach to gender, and I make use of her understanding of gender’s relation to being throughout this project:

If gender is drag, and if it is an imitation that regularly produces the ideal it attempts to approximate, then gender is a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core; it produces on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait (that array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation), the illusion of an inner depth...The psyche is not “in” the body but in the very signifying process through which that body comes to appear it is the lapse in repetition as well as its compulsion, precisely what the performance seeks to deny and that which compels it from the start.
(728)

Butler asserts that gender is not just an internal expression but is apparent by the “signifying process” of performance (728). There is a physicality to the perceived reality of gender, that which is produced “through the gesture, the move, the gait” (728). Butler continues to insist that the performance of gender is the very act of who we are, and thus part of our identity (or how we “come to appear”): “In opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models which take the gendered self to be prior to its acts, I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the

identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief*” (“Performative” 520). In other words, gender performance and identity are intertwined. It is not that gender comes before the gender performance but rather the performance constitutes the “I.” Butler continues analyzing the interior and exterior of gender performance, stating “I am suggesting that this self is not only irretrievably 'outside,' constituted in social discourse, but that the ascription of interiority is itself a publicly regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication” (Performative 528). Butler insists that there is no performance of gender if there is not an interior embodiment of that gender. There is both an internal and external regulation that motivates gender performance and thus the identity of the performer. This article seeks to establish a link between posthuman theories and gender/queer studies. Using Brontë's novels (*Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853)), I look at instances where the Victorian automaton emerges. I argue that, as Huxely's article establishes, the Victorian automaton is not a physical being but rather the result of Victorian ideals and established moral code that creates the “Victorian Lady.” For this reason, I dub this automaton the “phantom automaton” because it quite literally exists only in the consciousness (or lack of consciousness) of the mind. However, similar to modern technologies of today (Siri and Alexa), a gendering of this automaton occurs. It is not just an automaton but rather a woman automaton. In order for Brontë's characters (Jane and Lucy) to resist the reflexive automaton of the mind, they must first combat the Victorian social structure and male gaze that forces them to become the “Victorian Lady.”

Charlotte Brontë's use of heroines in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* provides an intimate look at women's experiences in the nineteenth century. In both novels, Brontë is concerned with images of power structures and how these women maneuver and find pleasure within those power structures, particularly in relation to technologies of the gaze and the panopticon. Both heroines,

Jane and Lucy, are outsiders within their world—Jane as a governess and Lucy as an English teacher in a French school. The othering of these two characters, I argue, allows them to be precursors for today’s othered posthuman characters. Jane famously asks Rochester, “do you think I am an automaton?” (292). Not only does Jane signify the otherness she feels but also demonstrates that this idea of automated intelligence was not just a vague concept in the nineteenth century but a concrete idea and image. It is through Brontë’s exploration of the psychological process of surveillance that she reveals to the reader the use of observation and how humans change their behavior according to the surveillance of them. Jane and Lucy both participate in putting on artificial personalities to placate the power structures, i.e. the patriarchal systems of power within the novel. Both Jane and Lucy consciously curate their behavior, and both heroines use observation as a way to both see the power structures within the novel and to enact their own humanity, which emerges in *Villette* as the female heroine’s queer and deeply human masochism.

The scene halfway through *Jane Eyre* when Rochester and Jane finally confess their love for each other is one filled with passion and anger. Jane, who is under the impression that she and Rochester are spiritual equals and in love despite the differences of their class and gender, is disturbed by Rochester’s uncouth teasing when he tells her that he indeed will have a bride but implies this bride will not be Jane. Rochester knows that Jane thinks he is referring to Blanche Ingram and pursues this joke intentionally: “My bride! What bride? I have no bride! ... Yes,—I will!—I will!” (292). Faced with the sudden revelation that Rochester has chosen another woman more fitting of his noble status, Jane is caught off guard. She reacts in anger (“something like passion”) giving voice to one of the novel’s most memorable statements on women’s equality:

“I tell you I must go!” I retorted, roused to something like passion. “Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? *Do you think I am an automaton?—a machine without*

feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! (292; emphasis added)

In this moment Jane knows that if Rochester marries Blanche, she cannot allow herself to stay at Thornfield because the only way she could do so would be to become “an automaton” or “a machine without feelings” (292). Her banter with Rochester and the equality she has sensed between their two souls will be forgotten, forcing her to hide her emotions and affect permanently becoming a “soulless and heartless” machine (292). In processing her passionate emotions at the prospect of becoming the automaton, we might say that Jane *creates* the automaton. By *creates*, I mean not a literal construction of another person but rather the construction immaterial persona. That is, the automaton becomes a stand-in for Jane in the hypothetical situation that Rochester will withdraw his love and marry someone else. This machine is Jane or at least an *aspect* of Jane—the specter of Jane that she thought she was moving beyond or transcending in becoming Rochester’s equal soulmate before what she interprets as a cruel return to reality.

In this nineteenth-century reference to artificial intelligence, Brontë imagines a double of the Victorian heroine, one that is provocatively artificial or robotic. Doubles, of course, are nothing new in feminist criticism of Brontë’s novels. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), first point out the prevalence of the double in the repression of Victorian women in Victorian literature. This seminal work culminates in the revelation that Bertha Mason—the eponymous madwoman in the attic—acts as the dark double of Jane and represents the pure emotion and anger that Victorian women cannot express. Bertha, as they suggest, is “Jane’s truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the

ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead” (360). Bertha, as Gilbert and Gubar surmise, is the phantom of Jane’s own feelings. This phantom trapped in the attic of a mansion, crying out in the night, and setting Thornfield Hall on fire is a metaphor for Jane’s need to escape her own environment through anger and affect. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her article “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (1985), analyses Bertha Mason not just as a double of Jane but how Bertha functions in novel “to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law” (249). Spivak’s argument is that Bertha demonstrates how “the politics of imperialism” determine both human identity and the human soul (250). Bertha Mason also offers another look at how this phantom automaton is constructed. Rochester does not want Jane to be his *bride* but rather a machine *without* feelings. He wants Jane to continue her work as his employee, but to lock away her own emotions and feelings. In other words, Rochester wants Jane to be the “white” version of Bertha Mason. Blanche Ingram, as an example of an accomplished Victorian lady, later emphasizes this whiteness.

Who is this other being, this other double—the automaton? Critics have not yet addressed the Victorian automaton and the questions of artificiality the automaton puts on the table. I suggest that the automaton arises not as the Victorian woman’s taboo excess of emotions but as an equally horrifying emotionless phantom, a kind of uncanny sister of the “madwoman in the attic.” This phantom is not locked in the attic; rather, it is the hypothetical reality of drudgery that Jane imagines living when Rochester rejects her yet retains her as his machine-like employee.

Jane Eyre is also a novel that allows us to recognize the importance of the male gaze in the social construction of gender and the deconstructive process I am calling the disassembly of the human. The reason Jane responds with anger in the passage above is because she believes she has

misunderstood Rochester's affections. She suddenly sees herself not through her own desire but through his eyes, and the refocusing of this gaze brings her back down to earth, rendering her not the bride but the automation. Jane, and the reader through her, are forced to consider the possibility that Rochester has all along conceived of the Victorian governess as society has constructed her: a loveless, unfeeling servant rather than a feeling woman capable of equal emotion and passion. Jane's explosive response to this realization is less a reaction of the jilted woman than a revulsion to the implicit power structure that determines her social relation to Rochester at this moment—at stake, in other words, is Rochester's perception of the working woman and the broader social framework from which this perception springs. To be a working Victorian woman, as Jane implies here, is to become sexless, emotionless, and cold.

Yet as Jane's explosive rhetoric indicates, this is a role she rejects. She knows that to be a full human—one with a soul and heart—she must resist the automaton that Victorian women represent in the eyes of others. Brontë calls attention to power structures, the male gaze, and the construction of women's subjectivity within disciplinary structures in order to embody and interrogate what it means to be a woman and to be a human. Power structures and the ability to observe and react to those structures are one of the encoded aspects of human existence within the world. A woman can become an automaton just by the way she is seen by others. To what extent can the Victorian woman resist becoming the automaton? This is what Brontë seems to ask through Jane.

This article delves deeper into the disassembly of the human in Victorian novels by offering a compilation and analysis of key close readings and examples of the figure of the pre-posthuman female automaton as it appears in both Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and later novel *Villette*. Although this is the only passage in which Brontë uses the specific word "automaton," automatic,

artificial, and unreal figures of women's living lifelessness linger on the margins of both of these texts. The automaton is a shadow monster, a looming figure that threatens to annihilate not just Jane but also her humanness: "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?" (292). The automaton is a foe formed by society and power structures and recognized and brought into existence by Jane's own perception of herself. It is thus difficult to contend with, even as it reflects an aspect of the Victorian heroine's own self.

Throughout *Jane Eyre*, we see Jane confronted by characters who embody the automaton figure both in her childhood and adult life. Although Jane's tendency towards shyness, repression, and quietness has been read as shame by previous critics of the novel, I assert that Jane's hard exterior and hesitancy to express herself with "something like passion" for most of the novel speaks to the looming threat of the automaton.² Miss Temple, Jane's admired instructor, known for her kindness towards Jane and Helen, becomes the prime template for what Jane believes to be a properly behaved Victorian woman (automaton). Gilbert and Gubar rightly point out that Miss Temple is a character constructed "by Mrs. Sarah Ellis ... conduct book for Victorian girls" (344). This conduct manual emphasizes the religious duty of women in the household and that these women had an obligation to instill moral values in children. Miss Temple feeds the hungry and—as her name implies—shows God's quiet kindness to all; Miss Temple is Jane's example of the perfect Victorian woman. As Jane states after her encounter with Miss Temple: "I resolved, in the depth of my heart, that I would be most moderate—most correct; and, having reflected a few minutes in order to arrange coherently what I had to say" (84). This is the moment when Jane

² Jane's hard exterior has also been read as a residual effect of shame from her childhood. Ashley Bennett in her article "Shameful Signification" (2010) discusses that shame rather than anger works within the narrative of "contours of gendered interiority and social relations" (300). Similar to Gilbert and Gubar's argument, Bennett argues that shame, not anger, suppresses Jane's self-expression (300-01). The crux of Bennett's argument is that we as readers are introduced to Jane's childhood shame especially Lowood. Though Jane subdues her anger through the shame implemented in her life, there is another childhood experience that informs Jane's perception of the automaton.

leaves behind her childhood outburst to turn to emulate the quiet demeanor of her teacher and role model. Like Miss Temple, she will “be most moderate.” As Joan Perkins observes, the religious education of young girls in the nineteenth century centers on “the subordination of women” (31). Miss Temple not only exemplifies this kind of teaching, but her influence on Jane’s own construction of her shadow automaton emphasizes the social construction of the automaton. Jane sees Miss Temple put on the mask of womanhood to suppress her emotions, performing the decorum expected of her as a Victorian human who is gendered female.

This is the first instance of Jane beginning to recognize and construct the double person that will become her own automaton phantom, one who is quiet and careful about what she says. Yet, the automaton is sustainable neither for Miss Temple nor, ultimately, for Jane. Despite having a quiet demeanor, Miss Temple still has flashes of rage under her quiet exterior. These are exposed, for example, by her hatred of Mr. Brocklehurst (the cruel headmaster): “Mr. Brocklehurst is not a god: nor is he even a great and admired man: he is little liked here,” she tells the girls angrily (82). Miss Temple has suppressed her rage at the male overseer of her school, and she has become the quiet automaton that is required of her, but Brontë calls attention to the difficulty of this suppression. As Gilbert and Gubar suggest, this tension is a common feature not just in this novel but across Victorian literature and culture.

Whereas Miss Temple is an example of an automaton that follows the religious education typical for young Victorian girls, Jane, later in the novel, encounters another automaton that represents an “accomplished” Victorian woman: Blanche Ingram. The beautiful Blanche Ingram, clothed in white, is docile and “greatly admired” (185). As her name and clothing implies, she is a Blanche, white, or “Blank” canvas on which Rochester can paint his image of the perfect

Victorian lady.³ Mrs. Fairfox, the housekeeper, discloses to Jane that the reason Blanche is so greatly admired is not just her good looks, but because she is “accomplished” and wealthy (187). The suggestion here is that Blanche performs as a Victorian lady should, singing songs and playing the piano for the pleasure of others (185). Like a robot reproducing the written script, Blanche is able to mimic the songs of others. Blanche, then, is not dissimilar to Miss Temple; she is another example of the automaton that Jane fears becoming: a blank canvas that can reflect and mimic in the ways expected of the ideal woman without ever creating or feeling for itself. We cannot ignore the fact that Blanche’s name and status positions her as a white Victorian lady. The horror of the automaton is not just the lack of emotions but also the implicit whiteness of the automaton. Blanche Ingram is the docile white accomplished woman, whereas Bertha Mason (as previously stated) is the emotional Creole woman.

Blanche becomes one of the obstacles that Jane must overcome in her courtship with Rochester. In the passage above, Blanche is the hypothetical bride, the woman who threatens to displace Jane and render the Victorian heroine a machine without feelings. When we explore the specific aspects of the automaton that Jane fears, a paradox emerges in relation to the figure of the other woman, Blanche. Jane fears that if Rochester marries Blanche, she will be turned into a bland, “blanche[d],” or boring character similar to Blanche. In other words, Jane fears she will become the well-mannered meek Victorian woman that society expects her to be. *Jane Eyre* cannot accommodate this nightmare any more than it can accommodate the angry Bertha Mason. Yet Blanche is herself a kind of automatic woman. Like the shadow image of the automaton itself,

³ Rochester’s male gaze defines how Blanche interacts with him. Laura Mulvey in her seminal work *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989), describes the psychoanalysis of the male gaze in film. As she explains, “The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female which is styled accordingly” (62). Mulvey, to explain this gaze, relies on film shots that pan over a woman mimicking a gaze that objectifies women. The male characters in Brontë’s novels project their own image of how a woman should behave onto their female counterparts. It is through their gaze that these men not only reflect their own fantasy but also exert their power over others. What makes Brontë’s work distinct is that Jane is aware of the male character’s surveillance.

Blanche is a side character within *Jane Eyre*—we rarely hear her voice and she does not have a prominent place in the novel’s conclusion. For this reason, Blanche fades into the background of the plot when Jane ascends to the role of true “bride.” Yet, like the automaton who emerges in the scene above, Blanche still casts a shadow over Jane’s own heart. The threat of the looming automaton is removed from Jane’s courtship by attaching Blanche more firmly to this undesirable role.

Art and the male gaze are crucial in the distinction the novel draws between Jane and Blanche. After feeling jealous of the attention that Blanche receives from Rochester, Jane reflects on her feelings towards Rochester, stating, “*You [are] gifted with the power of pleasing him?*” (186). The reason for Jane’s jealousy is that she feels that Rochester’s attention and surveillance are nothing more than an employer observing his worker. Whereas Blanche is capable of satisfying the desire of Rochester’s male gaze and thus pleasing him, Jane feels that she herself cannot adequately imitate the “accomplished” Victorian woman that Rochester wants. To suppress her emotions and so “moderate” her passions, as she has learned from Miss Temple, Jane paints two portraits that represent the male gaze of the novel: one of the paintings is titled “Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain” and the other is of Blanche “an accomplished lady of rank” (187). The purpose of these paintings in the novel is worth considering in relation to the theme of the double. Jane vows to compare these portraits in order to remind herself that she does not resemble the Victorian woman that Rochester is expected to marry. The title of Jane’s portrait of Blanche signifies yet again that Blanche’s performance of an accomplished, wealthy lady is what Jane sees as attractive to Rochester. Yet, whereas Jane is indeed plain on the outside, it is Blanche who becomes the automaton. She lacks depth and a complex humanity. Unlike Blanche—whom Gilbert and Gubar deem the “denizen of Vanity Fair”—Jane is able to *create*, not just mimic

(350). In preferring Jane over Blanche, both Rochester—and the novel itself—confirm the desirability of the heroine who *is* rather than merely acts the part of the real, feeling, creating Victorian woman.

As previously mentioned, Jane's cold exterior hides a tumultuous storm of emotions. Jane herself frequently recognizes this inconsistency:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (129-30)

In this passage Jane emphasizes that “women feel just as men feel,” indicating to the reader once again that what the Victorian social construction of women as unfeeling machines lacks is emotional expression, which causes them to become “too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation” (129). What Jane is concerned with here is the equality or fullness of humanity between men and women. Jane herself understands that women are not just the “rigid” beings but are capable of complex feelings and emotions (129). Jane even calls this kind of thinking “narrow-minded” as she advocates for the same equality she feels with Rochester. This stagnation and restraint is the figure of the automaton that Jane repeatedly encounters and actively tries not to become. She knows that women in general copy the pre-molded version of an accomplished Victorian woman. Brontë calls attention to scenes of women’s sensation (creative expression and art-making/experiencing) as the determinative site of being and acting as “the human” who has a soul equal to others (men, non-clones). In this way, the novel positions “being human” in

opposition to “being a woman,” even as it questions that division. The Victorian human is the woman who is not the “accomplished woman” but something else, something more.

Unlike Blanche, Jane does not perform or mimic, but creates and provides glimpses of an autonomous and creative “inside”—which is what Rochester comes to see and love as her “soul.” It is shocking for Rochester to realize that a seemingly emotionless automaton is capable of creating something that grows out of her own emotional expression. The novel’s proto-feminist message emerges not from Rochester’s politically progressive views on women’s equality, (he is not just an unlikely feminist), but more specifically from Rochester’s perception of this inward quality of the working, machine-like woman. At first, Rochester is dubious of Jane’s artistic capability. While evaluating her paintings to see if Jane is an accomplished governess, Rochester questions, “Where did you get your copies?” to which Jane replies, “Out of my head” (146). Rochester is surprised to learn that Jane does not just mimic or copy images that she has already but is able to produce something and something that is a part of her. It is through her creation—Jane’s art—that Rochester catches glimpses of Jane’s feelings and comes to recognize that she is more than an automaton. Jane demonstrates to Rochester that she is indeed not an automaton—“soulless and heartless”—but a complex human being not just defined as a Victorian woman. Brontë is still conceding to the power of the male gaze; however, the novel constructs Rochester into a kind of man who sees the soul within the Victorian automaton.

Blanche and Miss Temple are representations of the shadow automaton that are kept at bay in the novel. However, after her marriage is interrupted by the revelation that Bertha is already Rochester’s wife, Jane is forced back into the role of the automaton when she begins teaching poor orphans at the school in Morton. During this time, when Jane seems to have fully embodied the automaton templated by Miss Temple, she feels another aspect of her life tugging on her:

At this period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than sank with dejection: and yet, reader, to tell you all, in the midst of this calm, this useful existence—after a day passed in honourable exertion amongst my scholars, an evening spent in drawing or reading contentedly alone—I used to rush into strange dreams at night: dreams many-coloured, agitated, full of the ideal, the stirring, the stormy—dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester. (423)

The stormy dreams represent the anger and feelings Jane has chosen to ignore. The “stirring” sensation she feels is not just a sexual sensation but the reality that she has given up part of herself in order to perform in a socially acceptable way for someone of her rank. Again and again, Jane’s mind wanders to Rochester, the one who has recognized her status as more than the working machine. More than romantic longing, her desire for Rochester in this part of the novel is thus her desire to be the non-automaton.

In this reading of the novel, I argue that Jane fully rejects the shadow automaton once she rejects St. John Rivers’s marriage proposal. Jane realizes that St. John can never truly know her when she reveals to him one of her portraits. When Jane shows St. John her painting, his reaction is to refuse to look at Jane: “he shunned [her] eye” (428). The revelation of Jane’s soul through her painting is too much for him to understand. By ignoring her gaze (shunning her eye), St. John also ignores not only Jane’s desires and feelings but her capacity as a feeling and desiring human subject. At Thornfield Hall Rochester and Jane become part of the same soul through their mutual understanding of Jane’s paintings. The novel gives us reason to believe this has much to do with their shared vision or gaze of a woman’s equality as defined as her inner expressive depth. However, this shared vision is only achieved by Rochester’s loss of sight (male gaze) in order to

truly “see” Jane. Rochester and Jane are equals on a deeper emotional and almost spiritual level. But St. John cannot feel what Jane feels. St. John’s reaction to her painting even prompts her to anger: “he almost started at my sudden and strange abruptness: he looked at me astonished” (428). The same anger from her childhood outbursts begins to resurface in this rejection.

The automaton is no longer in control of Jane. After Jane rejects St. John Rivers’ proposal of marriage, she finds herself happily “quite rich” due to her uncle’s death (501). She travels to the rubble remains of Thornfield Hall and finds a blind Rochester. All monstrous automatons are removed from her life. She is no longer in the shadow of Miss Temple or Blanche Ingram and thus Jane and Rochester are free to live out their lives with no threat of the monsters—whether in the attic or in the shadows—to interfere. This conclusion to *Jane Eyre* is both simplistic and overly happy. Jane no longer has to fight the automaton within—as if by rejoining with Rochester the monstrous double of the automaton ceases to exist. This conclusion seems to imply that the automaton can be vanquished. However, Charlotte Brontë’s later novel *Villette* (1853) offers more complex examples of the monstrous automaton. In this novel, Lucy Snowe discovers other, more convincing solutions to deal with the threat posed by the soulless working machine known as the Victorian woman. Within *Jane Eyre* the monsters fade away when Jane becomes an independent woman and finds a marital partner whose gaze grants her human equality and fullness of being. Lucy Snowe is granted neither excessive riches nor a happy marriage; instead, she takes masochistic delight in penetrating her own automaton.

Jane’s conflict with her own automaton and the automatons around her disappears at the end of novel, leaving the conflict of the automaton unresolved. But in *Villette* the main heroine tackles her own automaton by taking masochistic delight in her own and others’ automaton. Lucy participates in the non-human characteristics of women in order to gain pleasure from being seen

or treated as less than. Jane seems to ignore the automaton within, but Lucy finds agency by relating, perversely, to her own automaton. Masochism, as I will demonstrate, is not just a sexual desire or proclivity but the emergence of a kind of humanness or strategy of being human available to the Victorian woman. As a queer sexuality and social positioning against a repressive and heterosexual norm, masochism becomes a way for Lucy to work outside the bonds of feminine gender roles that would render her the automaton. Lucy subversively embraces the artificial persona of the automaton, thereby disassembling notions of reality and being human.

Lucy's double life is often read as possessing a queer subtext, both in relation to masochism and Lucy's homoerotic desire for other women. In *Between Women* (2007), Sharon Marcus observes that, "Lucy is constantly stymied in female friendships she constructs as obstacles rather than conduits to marriage" (107). To Marcus, Lucy is a repressed lesbian who is stifling her chances of marriage with her attraction to her female friends. In this queer reading of the novel, Marcus dismisses Lucy's masochistic tendencies as part of her "feelings for women and men" that "take shape as suffering, pain, and privation" (107). I argue that Lucy's queerness stems from these self-harming and violent fantasies that are driven by degrading scenarios. In broadening the definition of queer beyond same-sex attraction, Lucy not only exhibits desire for other women but also an interest in kink pleasures, namely her affinity for sadomasochistic thoughts, imagery, and actions. Within this context, Lucy discovers a new and queer mode of relating to the shadowing monster of the automaton.

Even more than Jane perhaps, Lucy is well aware of her double life as a woman—not just the double life that the construction of the shadow automaton creates, but also the double life of her own masochistic fantasies. First, I will establish the basis for Lucy's masochistic sexual fantasies before close reading passages that I argue represent the shadow automaton. After Lucy

is interviewed by Madame Beck, her new mysterious employer in Rue Fossette, she contemplates her own thoughts: “I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter” (140). Lucy’s double life, her “life of thought,” is often read as a representation of this repression (140). For example, Mary Jacobus sees Lucy’s confession of a double life as a means to guide the reader to “misread it [the narrative]” (43). Even if Lucy is misdirecting the reader, she is well aware of her secret desires; aware enough to feed them with “necromantic joys” (140). Throughout the rest of the narrative, Lucy divulges to the reader these dark and violent joys. Lucy actively feeds these desires, causing them to grow. Thus, Lucy’s doubleness is evident not just in her repression, but in the queerness of the sexual pleasure she seems to derive from her maintenance of a double life. Jacobus asserts that Lucy’s double life is represented in the novel by “ghostly subtext” (43). I argue that Lucy is aware of these “ghostly” desires and “nourish[es]” her desires through masochistic fantasies of her own powerlessness. This process at once sustains the automaton (feeding it), while creating the space for Lucy to be a real human in her secret doubleness and distance from the maintained necromantic fantasy.

Walter D. Mignolo makes a similar observation about humanness in his article “Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to be Human?” Mignolo asserts that Wynter’s work demonstrates that humanness is not independent from the categories and concepts that create it, stating that

[t]he problem of the Human is thus not identity-based per se but in the *enunciations* of what it means to be Human –enunciation that are concocted and circulated by those who most convincingly (and powerfully) imagine the “right” or “noble” or “moral” characteristic of Human ... [t]he human is therefore the product of a particular

epistemology, yet it appears to be (and is accepted as) a naturally independent entity existing in the world.” (108)

The regulation and curation of the “human” through morality and nobleness is seen through the manufacturing and creation of the “Victorian Lady.” However, Lucy indulges in the immoral and thus creates her own humanness outside of the scripted, automated human that Victorian morals create. Lucy actively seeks out masochistic delights to break free of the phantom Victorian automaton.

In various scenes throughout *Villette*, Lucy takes masochistic delight in violent biblical stories. For example, while the Catholic students and teachers discuss the “tales of moral martyrdom,” Lucy sits nearby listening (Brontë 184). The stories turn violent, discussing “trampling to deep degradation high-born ladies . . . the most tormented slaves” (184). These stories of ladies subjected to slave treatment causes Lucy to become “burning hot” and her wrist begins “throbbing” (184). Lucy is clearly agitated and arguably sexually excited by these stories to the point where she “could sit no longer” (184). The image of a lady forced to be humiliated and tortured causes Lucy’s imagination to come alive. Lucy acts out violently, “breaking off the points of [her] scissors by involuntarily sticking them somewhat deep in the worm-eaten board of the table” (184). Lucy’s action of “sticking” is both sexual and a sign of frustration. Her reaction to these stories shows a glimpse of her “necromantic” pleasures and the type of thoughts that feed them (140). Lucy explores two fantasies of power in her mind: firstly, her masochistic desire as she envies the ladies in the martyr stories and wishes pain upon herself, and secondly she envisions herself as the inflictor of the pain, inhabiting the male role of penetrator. Lucy’s phallic act of aggressively stabbing the table is, in this regard, a role reversal enabled by her double life. Indeed, this masochistic doubleness—both receiving and inflicting pain—becomes the model for how

Lucy deals with her own inner monster—her automaton. Through masochism, Lucy finds agency by taking pleasure in the scripted behavior of Victorian women. By participating in the passionless, sexless aspects of Victorian culture that would prevent her from expressing her true desires, Lucy finds humanness through the sexual pleasure she has from the script of the automaton.

As Jack Halberstam argues in *Skin Shows* (2006), gothic sexuality is represented by the gothic monsters defined as “a body haunted by a monstrous sexuality and forced into repressing its Gothic secrets” (20). It is through the repression of sexuality that the gothic monster emerges. Lucy’s monsters take the form of a pupil—that Lucy calls a cretin—and a phantom nun who has broken her vow of chastity. During school vacation, Lucy is left alone at the school and becomes the impromptu caretaker of “a poor deformed and imbecile pupil, a sort of cretin” (228). The cretin not only represents Lucy’s loneliness but also the automaton. Lucy sees the cretin as the Victorian monster that represents what she fears most: a representation of the dead living. While alone in the school, Lucy is forced to face her loneliness. She is forced in this lonely moment to reevaluate her life, stating that “[she] found it but a hopeless desert: tawny sands, with no green fields, no palm-tree, no well in view” (228). Brontë imagines this existential episode in opposition to the happy cretin who, by virtue of her lack of desire and imaginative inner life, can survive this deprivation. The cretin becomes the face of an emotionless female figure. This figure represents the fear of a woman who cannot “feel” human.

Once Lucy becomes an English teacher, she discovers that Madame Beck’s house was previously a convent that had the “inheritance of a ghost-story,” a tale in which a “black and white” nun haunts the garden (172). This detail of the nun being both “black and white” mirrors the double nature of Lucy herself—the automaton and Lucy. The nun is the pious image of a Victorian woman, but once the nun breaches her holy vow she is no longer permitted to live. The nun dies,

according to the legend, by a live burial for “some sin against her vow” (172). As Eve Sedgwick suggests, the Gothic “live burial” (22) is a metaphor for repression of homosexuality: “A prison which is neither inside nor outside is self-evidently one from which there is no escape” (26). Just as the automaton is buried within the psyche of Lucy and Jane, the nun is buried alive for her deviant desires. The ghost nun in this way can be read as another double, another figure of the automaton monster that lurks inside of Lucy. Like the nun, Lucy is threatened with a living burial. For this reason, perhaps, after coming face to face with the “snowy-veiled woman” in the garden, Lucy comes to the conclusion that, “she came out of my brain” (330). Lucy believes the phantom is literally inside her, an extension of her own imagination.

The ending of the nun’s haunting is mildly underwhelming. The nun of the mind changes into the nun of reality when it is revealed that the specter is actually Ginevra’s lover who has donned the costume to gain access to her at the school (574-75). In a cruel joke, Ginevra gifts Lucy the nun costume with one last fright: “I saw stretched on my bed the old phantom” (569). Spreading the nun across Lucy’s bed becomes a mockery of Lucy’s supposed lack of sexuality. It also lays bare the social construction of the sexless nineteenth-century woman—the nun, as it turns out, is a mere costume or set of clothes. Yet this does not mean that the ghost is not “real.” On the contrary, as Jacobus states, “natural and supernatural are brought ambiguously into play; the nun is at once solid, material, and capable of bringing about changes in the weather” (50). The nun’s supernatural abilities and, as I argue, her sexual significance in relation to Lucy, should not be disregarded. Even the nun costume being placed on Lucy’s bed has queer implications. When Lucy first enters the room, she does not realize it is the nun’s clothing but thinks the nun herself is “stretched on [her] bed” in an almost seductive manner (569). The death of the nun stretched out

on Lucy's bed metaphorically represents how Lucy deals with her own internal nun (or automaton): she uses queer sexual pleasure to kill her internal pious Victorian woman.

Whereas the nun and the cretin are physical manifestations of the internal automaton, the automaton reappears in the novel in paintings that Lucy observes in a museum. Jane as an artist uses observation to create art and thus interprets life through art. As a spectator of art Lucy offers a reading of a few different types of painting in the museum. In a gallery, Lucy is particularly taken by a painting of large, voluptuous women "half-reclined on a couch" (275). However, her observation of the Cleopatra is interrupted by M. Paul, who asks, "How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at *that* picture?" (277). Here we see another instance of men trying to control women through the power of surveillance. M. Paul is appalled that Lucy should be interested in a half-clothed woman, and wishes to orient her towards what he considers a more appropriate line of sight. Despite the fact that M. Paul himself is looking at the painting, he wishes to control where Lucy casts her own eyes. It is also worth noting the name "M. Paul" sounds similar to the word "impale." His very act of observing Lucy while she observes the paintings becomes a voyeuristic endeavor with all the sexual undertones that "impale" implies. However, he is wary of the impact the Cleopatra could have on Lucy's own perception of women. Trying to avert her gaze away from a painting that blatantly portrays the female body, M. Paul turns Lucy towards another painting of four "flat, dead, pale, and formal" scenes of women (277). As Margaret Shaw points out, this episode casts Paul as an "exaggerated figure of male censorship" (819). While Shaw is correct in asserting that this is M. Paul censoring Lucy's gaze, Shaw ignores that Lucy herself is also unimpressed by all the images of the women presented to her at the museum, the sensual and the flat alike. Upon observing the four maids in the latter painting, she notes:

The first represented a "Jeune Fille," coming out of a church-door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up—the image of a most villainous little precocious she-hypocrite. The second, a "Mariée," with a long white veil, kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger, and showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner. The third, a "Jeune Mère," hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon. The fourth, a "Veuve," being a black woman, holding by the hand a black little girl, and the twain studiously surveying an elegant French monument, set up in a corner of some Père la Chaise. All these four "Anges" were grim and grey as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts. What women to live with! insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities! As bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers. (277-78)

Lucy states it best by saying these women represent, "brainless nonentities" (278). The four maids and the Cleopatra display to Lucy the artificial selves that are available to women; they are mere shells. The word "brainless nonentities" echoes Jane's feelings about Rochester's fiancée, Blanche Ingham, suggesting that Lucy again perceives the monster of the automaton. Yet, in this novel, Brontë would seem to turn the male gaze inside out. While M. Paul is caught up in the chasteness of the four maids, Lucy penetrates its artificiality, the captured images of what women *should* be in society: chaste virgin or sexual sinner.

This scene between M. Paul and Lucy has flirtatious undertones. As previously discussed, Lucy finds pleasure from Catholic images of religious suffering, particularly "tales of moral martyrdom" (184). The images of the "Jeune Fille" perhaps conjure the same amount of excitement from Lucy, in a different way—not stimulating, but still rousing Lucy to a heightened emotion. M.

Paul likewise is excited by Lucy's bold glances at the other painting of the Cleopatra, the image that borders on pornographic. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë concedes the determining reality of the male gaze—Rochester can glimpse Jane's soul, which elevates her to full humanity—but in *Villette* Lucy is the gazer; the pleasures and desires are all generated by her. Just as she takes on the male role of sexual penetrator in her masochistic fantasies, Lucy becomes the penetrator not just of the images of the automaton (the flat paintings). It is important to note that Lucy has great disdain for the Cleopatra, calling her “indolent gipsy-giantess” (278). The lounging queen represents to Lucy a lazy image of women. While M. Paul's preferred painting shows women blank and bland, the Cleopatra is the complete opposite. Lucy's reaction to both paintings gives insight into her own aesthetic values. Lucy prefers to live in the shadows, content to be the observer and use her surveillance to penetrate the curated exterior of others. Lucy states, “I like seeking the goddess in her temple, and handling the veil, and daring the dread glance” (564). Neither of the paintings demonstrate to Lucy what it means to be a woman. But these images—because they represent two idealized (i.e. socially scripted) versions of Victorian women—allow Lucy to penetrate them by her own surveillance and to ultimately derive pleasure from the experience. Brontë reveals that this power structure is not just a part of the woman's experience but in fact embodies what it means to be human. Power structures and the ability to observe and react to those structures are one of the encoded aspects of human existence within the posthuman world. This aspect of humanness stems from a gender dichotomy, hence why gender becomes an integrated consequence of posthuman characters.

In *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë demonstrates how surveillance is a form of social construction that plays out in the very narrative and form of the novel. Lucy Snowe is not just aware of the shadow automaton in the same way as Jane, but Lucy goes further to reveal in more depth to the

reader the psychological process by which the automaton is created—and the ways the automaton can be controlled actively by women. Not only does Lucy understand how the automaton is created but she herself seeks to see through the curated veil of others:

I always, through my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth; I like seeking the goddess in her temple, and handling the veil, and daring the dread glance. O Titaness among deities! the covered outline of thine aspect sickens often through its uncertainty, but define to us one trait, show us one lineament, clear in awful sincerity; we may gasp in untold terror, but with that gasp we drink in a breath of thy divinity; our heart shakes, and its currents sway like rivers lifted by earthquake, but we have swallowed strength. To see and know the worst is to take from Fear her main advantage. (564)

Lucy seeks to “penetrate” the veil in order to see the true essence of every individual (564). The use of the word penetrate conjures the male sex act, which reveals that Lucy understands the way in which the male gaze influences behavior by “penetrating” her being. However, Lucy is not casting her own fantasy onto an object, but rather replacing the observer with herself. *She* is the one that will be doing the masculine act of penetrating. She will be the one “handling the veil, and daring the dread glance” into the face of the hidden human (Brontë 564). This face is not the madwoman in the attic, but the true nature of someone—their actual humanness. The real monster in Lucy’s eyes is the veil. Just as a veil hides the face of a bride until she is presented at the altar, the automaton hides the human soul of the Victorian woman from observers.

After arriving at Rue Fossette, Lucy becomes keenly aware that she will no longer be the observer but also the observed: “Thus did the view appear, seen through the enchantment of distance; but there came a time when distance was to melt for me—when I was to be called down from my watch-tower of the nursery, whence I had hitherto made my observations, and was to be

compelled into closer intercourse with this little world of the Rue Fossette” (138). Lucy, as the observer, knows that once she takes the teaching job that enables her to leave her original nursery career behind, she will also come under a new type of surveillance from Madame Beck, the headmistress. Lucy knows that once she leaves the “watch-tower of the nursery” that she will lose some of her power by giving up her vantage point of surveillance (138).

Jane uses the term “automaton” to explain to Rochester what it is to hide her own human feelings; Lucy describes this same construction in similar language as a “mask.” Throughout the novel, Lucy explains that she needs to wear a mask in order to hide her true emotions. For example, when M. Paul tries to get Lucy to read classic Greek and Latin, she becomes upset because he clearly knows that she has not been classically trained to read in those languages. He continually stacks classics on her desk in order to provoke her shamed reaction (442). However, Lucy, determined to not show her true anger, explains to the reader that she replaces her countenance with a marbled mask: “Baffled—almost angry—he still clung to his fixed idea; my susceptibilities were pronounced marble—my face a mask” (442). Here we see an example of how Lucy strategically embraced the lifeless, flat “mask” in order to keep her inner feelings and desires secret.

John Hughes argues that Lucy’s mask is a protection from her true consciousness, “a problematic affective division between one’s inner and outer selves” (721). I agree with Hughes that the mask creates two selves. However, this mask creates not just an inner and outer self, but rather demonstrates the internal struggle of having an inner automaton to reckon with. What Hughes overlooks in his analysis is that Lucy is aware that she puts on a mask to hide her anger. Hughes’s argument hinges on the fact that Lucy protects her emotions from being exposed to M. Paul. This is the case, but Hughes continues to state that Lucy does this only out of a “sense of

vulnerability” (721). Lucy hides her emotions not necessarily out of a sense of vulnerability, but because she knows that she keeps some form of power by not giving M. Paul the ability to see her irritation. Thus, the exchange above is not only an example of Lucy hiding her inner emotions but an example of how she deliberately constructs of the shadow automaton as a form of power and protection. Jane sees the automaton as an all-consuming monster, one that she must vanquish in order to preserve her own humanness. Lucy, by contrast, takes a queerer yet arguably more active approach to the automaton—embracing the monster in order to protect her own humanness. In seeking to “penetrate” others’ veils, Lucy is the one in control of her inner monster. In *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Jack Halberstam proposes “masochistic passivity” as a means to “step out of the easy model of transfer of femininity” (131). Specifically, Halberstam examines the way that self-harm brings down patriarchal models of power (133). Lucy’s sexual desire revolves around her infatuation with this kind of power and power play. Through her sexual fantasy and “necromantic joys” Lucy demonstrates her pleasure in masochistic and sadistic fantasies (140). But is through her penetration of her own automaton that she is able to take back power that she has lacked her entire life.

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë establishes the idea of the phantom automaton: the monster that is hidden within her heroines and doubled by other characters within the novel. But in the conclusion there is no real reckoning with the inner monster. Jane, after gaining her independence, is untroubled by the automaton she once feared. However, Brontë’s real reckoning with the inner automaton comes in her later novel *Villette*. Brontë constructs a heroine that is content in the pain of existence because she has found a way to derive pleasure from the “living burial” that is the life of the working Victorian woman. As a masochist, Lucy is able to penetrate her automaton for her own pleasure and seeks to penetrate the automaton of others. Through this masochism, Brontë

gives the reader a possible template to deal with the phantom automaton. Queerly, Lucy enjoys being and inhabiting the flat, non-human artifice, and this enjoyment is what makes her the most human. It is through the male gaze that the construction of the female automaton emerges, but it is by Lucy's own kink pleasure that she gains power in the face of the automaton jointly authored by men and Victorian society. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë acknowledges the influence of the male gaze on her heroine, but in *Villette* Lucy is able to take off her own "veil" and become the penetrating observer of her own and others' trust (564). This role reversal and Lucy's masochistic fantasies allow her to disassemble the human by creating space for her own agency in subversion of the limited social scripts given to Victorian women.

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