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## Charlotte Brontë's Vilette, Mid-Victorian Anti-Catholicism, and the Turn to Secularism

Michael M. Clarke

*Loyola University Chicago*, [mclarke@luc.edu](mailto:mclarke@luc.edu)

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# CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *VILLETTE*, MID-VICTORIAN ANTI-CATHOLICISM, AND THE TURN TO SECULARISM

BY MICAEL M. CLARKE

Barred from university and pulpit, [women] were also forbidden to write in the traditional genres of theology, the treatise and the sermon. Their theological ideas appear instead in nontraditional genres, in letters, novels, pamphlets, [and] devotional manuals, . . . disguised as uncontroversial religious writings.

—Julie Melnyk, *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*<sup>1</sup>

[In *Villette*], the domestic novel breaks out of its confining walls and engages itself with man's larger moral and spiritual struggles. . . . This mélange of diary, memoir, *devoir*, and *lecture pieuse* wrung from the anguished heart of Lucy Snowe undoubtedly brought peace of soul to many of her contemporaries. . . . Looking simultaneously backward and forward, *Villette* is at once an ancestral voice and a prophetic voice in the house of fiction, speaking of what was past and passing and to come.

—Robert A. Colby, *Fiction With a Purpose*<sup>2</sup>

The view that Charlotte Brontë was anti-Catholic is so pervasive that, according to Diana Peschier, "The reading of Charlotte Brontë's novels, particularly *Villette* [1853], as being essentially anti-Catholic has become almost routine among her critics."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write, "Nothing is more irritating to some readers than the anti-Papist prejudice of *Villette*."<sup>4</sup> Charlotte's friend Harriet Martineau was the first to protest against *Villette*'s "passionate hatred of Romanism," which she found surprising in one normally "so large and liberal."<sup>5</sup> Brontë, however, felt these accusations to be unjust, writing in 1853 to Miss Margaret Wooler that the disapproval that the novel's representations of Catholicism had incurred "must be borne, and for my part, I can suffer no accusation to oppress me much which is not supported by the inward evidence of conscience and reason."<sup>6</sup>

Today the question remains whether Brontë was justified in thinking herself free of anti-Catholic prejudice. It is true that *Villette's* narrator Lucy Snowe is explicitly critical of the Catholics with whom she lives and works, describing them in terms that evoke the harshest stereotypes and prejudices of mid-century British anti-Catholicism. And yet, Lucy confesses to a Catholic priest, as Charlotte had done when she lived in Belgium, and falls in love with and is prepared to marry a Roman Catholic, Monsieur Paul Emanuel. Further evidence of Brontë's freedom from prejudice is that the love between Lucy and Paul Emanuel is the only instance of a happy relationship between Catholic and Protestant in the literature of the period, and Père Silas, the priest who attempts to convert Lucy to Catholicism, is one of only two sympathetic portraits of a Jesuit in Victorian literature known to me.<sup>7</sup> As Marianne Thormählen notes, "In its comfortable contemplation of a mixed marriage, *Villette* actually agrees with the attitudes of later ages in these matters, obviously going against the notions that prevailed in its own time."<sup>8</sup>

Debates over whether *Villette* is anti-Catholic, therefore, raise a deeper question: why did Brontë devise a narrative in which the differences between Catholic and Protestant play so pivotal a role, and in which the romantic plotline is dependent on the union of two characters who represent clashing faith traditions? One answer is that, as Michael E. Schiefelbein writes, "Lucy Snowe's attraction to the dogmatic Père Silas and to the mystique of Catholic ritual can be seen as an expression of Brontë's own attraction to [Constantine] Heger."<sup>9</sup> Although historically neither the Anglican nor the Roman Catholic Church would have sanctioned intermarriage between Lucy and Paul (nor between Brontë and Heger, even if Heger were not already married), Brontë envisions their union as a possibility and a fulfillment. Thus, while her attraction to Heger may account for some elements of Brontë's attitude toward Catholicism, it does not account for the widespread perception of anti-Catholicism that the novel evokes.

Other motives driving Brontë's treatment of Roman Catholicism must be considered. Like many women whose fathers, husbands, or brothers were ministers, writers such as Anne and Emily Brontë, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Elizabeth Sewell, Charlotte Brontë used the novel to explore religious and theological concepts that would have been forbidden to them in the pulpit, lectern, or Parliamentary seat. In fact, as Lisa Wang has observed, "the critical attention given to the anti-Catholic aspects of *Villette* has tended to eclipse notice of the novel's engagement with [broader] religious

discourse.”<sup>10</sup> At a time when Christianity itself was being challenged by new scientific discoveries and theories, by Biblical criticism that approached the Bible as a historical text rather than as Revelation, and by increasing knowledge of non-Christian religions, Charlotte Brontë placed the division between Catholic and Protestant at the heart of a novel that ultimately advocates an open and accepting stance toward religious difference.

Rather than taking a side or merely remaining open-ended, *Villette* recapitulates one of the dominant religious questions of nineteenth-century Western culture, the fundamental issues underlying the Protestant Reformation. In *Villette*, Brontë contrasts Roman Catholicism, with its observances of an enchanted universe, its saints’ days, rituals, carnivals, confessionals, Latin Masses, and religious vocations, against Protestantism, with its self-disciplined, rational ethos, its reliance on individual conscience and private reading of the Bible, and its dislike of elaborate ritual and ceremony. Brontë brilliantly portrays Roman Catholicism as existing within a hierarchical, communitarian world in which individual roles are determined by a pre-existing order of things, as opposed to the Protestant vision of a more horizontal, individualistic society in which the self-disciplined agent is endowed by God with reason and free will in order to pursue life, liberty, and happiness according to his or her own lights. Today the differences between Catholic and Protestant seem minor indeed in context of worldwide movements of major religious traditions and a predominantly secular culture. This paper attempts to demonstrate that Brontë’s representation of the relationship between Catholicism and Protestantism anticipates modern secularism in the best sense. The first step must be to examine the implications of the word “secularism” as Charles Taylor defines them.

#### I. SECULARISM

One version of Western cultural evolution holds that, in England, the long nineteenth century was marked by fierce battles in which a tolerant but hegemonic Protestant Christianity, under intense pressure from exclusive humanism and naturalistic materialism, and fighting a rearguard defense against incursions of Roman Catholicism, finally relinquished the last vestigial remnants of its hold over Victorian culture. The result is known as secularism. To some, this version of secularism represents a triumph of reason over superstition; to others, the loss of something vital to human thriving.

Today, Charles Taylor's magisterial book *A Secular Age* (2007) offers a more nuanced portrait of secularism than the one parodied above. On one level, secularism refers to the separation of church and state. In nineteenth-century England this process entailed the gradual emancipation of Non-conformist, Catholic, and Jewish citizens, and the removal of barriers to their participation in public institutions. Whereas in the past, few distinctions had existed between religious activity on the one hand, and political, economic, and social activity on the other—local government was the parish, and feasts and guilds maintained the daily rhythms and rituals of life—under secularism, public space was gradually “emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality.”<sup>11</sup> This is what Taylor calls “secularity 1.” A second use of the term refers to the “falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church.” According to this view, the decline in religious belief has been “powered by the rise of other beliefs, in science, reason, or by the deliverances of particular sciences [such as] evolutionary theory.” This is “secularity 2” (S, 2–4).

According to Taylor, secularism, fully understood, includes both: secularity 1, public spaces emptied of religion, and secularity 2, a decline in religious belief and practices. But it is more. In its fullest sense, secularism is the new context within which “all search and questioning about the moral and the spiritual must proceed”: this is secularity 3 (S, 20). Taylor refers to secularity 1 and 2 as “subtraction stories,” because they explain modernity “by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves” from earlier horizons of knowledge. Rather than resulting from subtraction alone, however, “Western modernity is the fruit of new inventions, [and] newly constructed self-understandings and related practices” (S, 22). Secularism includes the possibility of the vast majority of people believing in God, as is the case in the United States. Belief is not a given, as it once was, but it remains an option. We no longer “live naïvely within a theistic construal” but “shunt between two stances, [in which] everyone's construal is recognized as such, and for many the unbelief construal is the default option” (S, 14). It is not belief but rather “[n]aïveté [that] is now unavailable to anyone, believer or unbeliever alike” (S, 21).

Some of the distinguishing features of the development of secularism from roughly 1800 to 1950 include the shift toward what Taylor calls “The Modern Moral Order.” This shift involves a change in perception, according to which persons are no longer “essentially embedded within a society which in turn reflects and connects with the cosmos,

but rather disembedded individuals who come to associate together” in a society based upon principles of individual rights and mutual benefit (S, 447). According to this new social imaginary, religious affiliations resemble “‘affinity groups’ . . . that exist in a space of other ‘churches,’” something we freely choose to create or to join (S, 449). Although public space has been “emptied of God,” in a secular society political and religious structures sustain one another: “the Republic secures the freedom of the churches; and the churches sustain the Godly ethos which the Republic requires” (S, 453). In the aggregate, religious organizations form a society that guarantees the separation of church and state, and that demands pluralism.

In this Modern Moral Order, Taylor writes, individuals are no longer defined “since time out of mind” by pre-existing categories, but rather take their places in structures that they understand to have been designed by human agents, knowing also that they can be “induced, recruited, or forced into the creation of new structures” (S, 457, 460). Thus emerges a newly imagined “horizontal” society: “We have moved from a hierarchical order of personalized links to an impersonal egalitarian one; from a vertical world of mediated-access to horizontal, direct-access societies” (S, 209). With secularism arose a new space, the public sphere, in which members of society, independent of familial, religious, and political affiliations, are able to “come to a common mind . . . in a discourse of reason outside power, which nevertheless is normative for power” (S, 191). These elements of secularism—the disembedding of individuals from pre-determined social hierarchies, the egalitarian exchange of ideas, and religious pluralism—all characterize *Villette*’s resolution of the fundamental conflicts between Protestant and Catholic. It is to Brontë’s credit that she was able to anticipate these developments while living in an age characterized by enormous religious tension and conflict.

## II. PERSONAL AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON BRONTË’S VIEWS

Brontë’s relationship with Roman Catholicism has personal, historical, and literary roots. As the daughter of an Anglican minister in Yorkshire, Brontë lived in the shadow of a Protestant religious intolerance that included the story of Mary Clitherow, who in 1586 was crushed to death in York for harboring Roman Catholic priests. Two centuries later, anti-Catholic prejudice had eased considerably; England was sheltering some seven thousand French priests, monks, and nuns who were fleeing the Revolution; and the first Catholic Emancipation Act,

legalizing Catholic worship, was passed in 1791.<sup>12</sup> As Taylor notes, in Britain, unlike in France and Germany, Anglican hegemony was highly mitigated by religious pluralism.<sup>13</sup>

Brontë's father Patrick was an Irishman whose mother was Roman Catholic and whose father apparently professed no religious affiliation. As Tom Winnifrith and Edward Chitham note, Patrick's "ancestry was probably Catholic, his upbringing Non-conformist, [yet he became] an Anglican priest."<sup>14</sup> And although Patrick supported the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act, on the grounds that it would prevent violent rebellion in Ireland, he remained staunchly anti-Catholic.<sup>15</sup>

Brontë's own attitude toward Roman Catholicism was generally unfavorable, but it was complicated by several factors, including her experience in Brussels during the years 1842–43, where she fell in love with the Catholic Constantine Heger, and where, during a period of extreme loneliness, she went to Confession in the Cathedral of Sainte-Gudule. Upon her return to England in 1843, Charlotte re-entered a culture that was becoming increasingly anti-Catholic. The 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act had aroused great political and nationalist controversy. It passed, in large measure as an "attempt to appease Irish unrest," yet it included a number of anti-Catholic measures, including the "gradual Suppression and final Prohibition" of all male religious orders, and a ban on any Jesuits entering England from that time forward.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1840s, anti-Catholic fears were further stoked by the Oxford movement, by John Henry Newman's 1845 conversion to Catholicism, and by Prime Minister Robert Peel's proposal to triple and make permanent the annual British government subsidy to Maynooth, Ireland's leading Roman Catholic seminary. In addition, Irish immigration swelled the population of Catholics in England from 284,000 in 1847 to 758,000 in 1851, so that when, in 1850, Pope Pius IX issued a Papal bull proclaiming "the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England," widespread fears of "papal aggression" and the establishment of a "Romish Bondage" over free English necks seized the nation. In 1852, the year before Brontë published *Villette*, a mob attacked a Roman Catholic procession in Stockport, and the result was a Royal Proclamation that public processions of men wearing clerical gowns and carrying objects of worship threatened the peace and would henceforward be illegal.<sup>17</sup> In *Villette*, Brontë presents such a procession, not as dangerous, but "as tawdry, not grand; as grossly material, not poetically spiritual."<sup>18</sup>

As Margaret M. Maison indicates, anti-Catholicism was also an active force on the literary front:

[I]t was the restoration of the Hierarchy in 1850 that, provoking an extraordinary outburst of hysteria, fury and panic on the part of John Bull, whipped Protestant novelists up into a frenzy of rage and produced some of the most angry novels ever written, fulminating particularly against the “snakes,” “pests,” “poisonous microbes,” and “emissaries of Satan,” as the sons of Loyola were variously called.<sup>19</sup>

In 1848, Charles Kingsley published *The Saint's Tragedy*, an account of the life of the twelfth-century Elizabeth of Hungary and her spiritual director, Conrad. Kingsley portrays Conrad as a harsh tyrant, confirming contemporary prejudices against the power of Roman Catholic priests to turn women against their husbands and families. Brontë believed Kingsley's version of the relationship between Elizabeth and Conrad, writing to Elizabeth Gaskell in 1851 that it was “no poet's dream” because “we know such things have been done, that lives have been subjugated and lives laid waste in this manner.”<sup>20</sup> In *Villette*, Brontë will allude to this story as typical of the saints' tales that were read to the students nightly in Madame Beck's school.

*Villette*'s 1853 publication date coincided with the height of a revived anti-Catholicism in England. In *Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholic Discourses*, Peschier demonstrates that *Villette* contains many elements in common with other mid-century anti-Catholic novels, such as Rachel McCrindell's *The Schoolgirl in France* (1842), Andrew Steinmetz's *The Jesuit in the Family* (1847), Catherine Sinclair's *Beatrice* (1852), and Jemima Luke's *The Female Jesuit* (1853). As Peschier writes, “By creating a discourse of fear around the religious and moral safety of vulnerable females, [anti-Catholic] writers fuelled the belief that a secret and dangerous force that emanated from Rome was active in England and in Catholic schools on the Continent.”<sup>21</sup> These works co-existed with more even-handed treatments of the tension between Catholic and Protestant to be found in novels such as Frances Trollope's *Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits* (1847), Elizabeth Missing Sewell's *Margaret Percival* (1847), and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* (1852). Not one of these novels, however, envisions reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant as does *Villette*, making Brontë's novel all the more remarkable for its openness and acceptance of competing religious views.

Anti-Catholic feeling was inspired by various causes. Because, as Melnyk writes, “the Anglican Church had been formed in explicit



opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, . . . to be Protestant had become an essential element of Britishness.” Not only was Roman Catholicism seen as “un-English,” its adherents were considered to harbor dangerous loyalties to a foreign power.<sup>22</sup> Other concerns included an image of convents as unnatural places of spiritual enslavement if not of depravity; of confession as dangerous and even indecent conversation that interfered with wives’ relations with their husbands; and of priests, Jesuits especially, as masters of disguise, deceitful, covert, gliding spies and agents of the Pope who—and this was a crucial cause of abhorrence—claimed a power reserved to God, the power to forgive sins. Sheridan Gilley sums up the anti-Catholic feeling of mid-century England:

Britain was great because Britain was Protestant; and even Protestants who sat lightly to their religion believed devoutly in the congruity between the Protestant ethic of industry, sobriety, and thrift and the heroic spirit of progress and enterprise that carried British goods and soldiers and sailors as well as missionaries to the remotest corners of the earth. . . . Protestantism was patriotism, and popery was the religion of England’s enemies, France and Spain, and of the despised sister-kingdom of Ireland. Moreover, popery was tyranny, and Protestantism was liberty.<sup>23</sup>

Such reductive binary thinking was to be found on both sides of the question. As Walter Arnstein notes in *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England*, some Catholics also reduced “all intermediate positions . . . to two: the Catholic and the anti-Catholic,” and, as Cardinal Manning expressed it, saw the choice between Catholicism and Protestantism as a choice “between Rome and rationalism, between the divine certainty of faith, and the instability of human opinion, between the presence of a Divine Teacher and the solitude and darkness of the human soul.”<sup>24</sup> There is more than mere prejudice at work here: these debates indicate the deeper underlying differences that had divided Protestant from Catholic since the Reformation. In *Villette*, Brontë weaves those differences into the narrative fabric of her novel.

### III. PROTESTANT VS. CATHOLIC IN *VILLETTE*: THE ISSUES REALIZED

Brontë deserves recognition for the clarity with which she sees and conveys the essential differences between Catholic and Protestant. Presented indirectly, through the medium of the novel, her insights transcend anti-Catholic bias and rise to a level of theological under-

standing that we may appreciate today as being far ahead of her time. Woven into the fabric of the novel are events, acts, characters (and ghosts), debates, and yes, even tracts, that forward the movement of the novel from a position of narrow sectarianism to a more open and secular stance that says, in effect, “not one, or the other, but both. *Both* Protestantism and Catholicism are divinely appointed.” Brontë accomplishes this not through a vague erasure or blurring of differences, but by elucidating and confronting the differences at their deepest level, that is, at the point where Protestant Reform became a challenge to, and ultimately a separate set of institutions from, the Roman Catholic Church.

*Villette*'s reputation as an anti-Catholic novel is based in part on its representations of the culture and characters of the predominantly Roman Catholic kingdom of Labassecour (derived, it is generally agreed, from Brontë's experiences in Belgium), presented through the perspective of its narrator, the English Protestant Lucy Snowe. Lucy's view of Catholicism is harsh, but it is not presented ironically. It is, rather, a representative Protestant perspective on Catholicism, one that evolves beyond its initial narrowness but is never entirely repudiated, even as Lucy comes to know and love the Catholic Paul Emanuel. The conflict between her perspective and his provides much of the deep integrity of this novel about a Protestant stranger in a Catholic land.

Moreover, Brontë increased the anti-Catholic resonances of the novel by borrowing elements from a traditionally anti-Catholic subgenre, the Gothic, drawing especially on Matthew “Monk” Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), with its ghostly nun, the use of a nun's costume as disguise to facilitate sexual escapades, and a garden burial, as well as from Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1826), with its confession chamber and sinister priest.<sup>25</sup> Brontë uses these conventional tropes of anti-Catholic discourse in unconventional ways that both repeat and reverse their connotations. Rather than being merely rhetorical devices to signal anti-Catholic prejudice, *Villette*'s Gothic elements enable Brontë to explore fundamental religious and theological oppositions between the Protestant and Catholic faiths. *Villette* includes pious lectures, a buried nun who haunts the school where Lucy teaches, a confession, pressure to convert, religious debates, and a Carnival. These actions in turn signify deeper issues, which include control and suppression of desire, renunciation, surveillance and self-discipline, and the opposition between Catholicism's system of renunciative vocations for priests and nuns versus Protestantism's rejection of these in favor of the sanctification of ordinary life: of work, family, civic engagement,

and all that contributes to human flourishing. The novel also finally incorporates two competing views of the world: one, the vision of an enchanted cosmos of “spirits, demons, moral forces,” and magic, and the other, a disenchanting universe “in which the only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan is what we call minds . . . so that these thoughts, feelings, etc., are situated ‘within’” (S, 29–30).

The importance of the Protestant-Catholic question is suggested early in the novel through the unlikely medium of Ginevre Fanshawe, who declares to Lucy on their first meeting, “they call me a Protestant, you know, but really I am not sure whether I am one or not: I don’t well know the difference between Romanism and Protestantism. However, I don’t in the least care for that” (V, 6.73). Since, as a general rule, Ginevre represents everything that is to be rejected, it is clear that Lucy (and we) should care very much about “the difference between Romanism and Protestantism.”

Early in her stay at the Pensionnat run by Madame Beck, Lucy describes the evening custom of gathering students and teachers together for the “*lecture pieuse*.” Lucy finds the evening readings appalling and fanatical:

The ears burned on each side of my head as I listened, perforce, to tales of moral martyrdom inflicted by Rome; the dread boasts of confessors, who had wickedly abused their office, trampling to deep degradation high-born ladies, making of countesses and princesses the most tormented slaves under the sun. Stories like that of Conrad and Elizabeth of Hungary, recurred again and again, with all its dreadful viciousness, sickening tyranny and black impiety: tales that were nightmares of oppression, privation, and agony. (V, 13.163)

In referring to Elizabeth’s confessor, Conrad, as a vicious tyrant whose counsel amounted to “moral martyrdom inflicted by Rome,” Brontë of course draws upon Protestant rejection of the Roman Catholic belief that the Pope, through Apostolic succession, has inherited the authority conferred by Christ upon Peter, to empower priests to forgive sins. To Protestants, confession means interference between God and human, and the Roman priesthood represents a false claim to represent God. The Catholic priesthood also represents to Protestants a two-speed system of morality: one for priests and nuns, and the other for all the rest. As Taylor writes, reform brought about a greater unease with regard to “special vocations and counsels of perfection. There were not to be any more ordinary Christians and super-Christians. The renunciative vocations were abolished” (S, 77). According to Kingsley’s version

of the legend (of which there are conflicting accounts), Conrad had required Elizabeth to remain celibate while married, and the ideas of celibacy and suppression of female desire introduced indirectly in this scene will recur throughout *Villette* in the figures of the Buried Nun, Cleopatra, Vashti, Paul's beloved Justine, and Lucy herself.

The third criticism embedded in Lucy's description of the lecture is that of the "martyrdom" inflicted upon Elizabeth, which echoes the Reformation's rejection of "fanaticism" and "enthusiasm," that is, of any good that "took us out of the path of ordinary human enjoyment and productive activity," of any "aspiration beyond human flourishing" in favor of what David Hume defined as the "monkish virtues": "celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, and self-denial."<sup>26</sup> Thus, as Rosemary Clark-Beattie's analysis makes clear, "Catholicism is seen as a threat to the natural, English, Protestant fulfillment of marriage, children, and service to the community." Paradoxically, however, in rejecting the renunciatory vocations of a religious life, Protestantism built renunciation into ordinary life. In Brontë's novel, therefore, "Lucy's projection of the oppressor's role onto the Catholic Church collapses in the face of the contradictions it was created to heal. . . . Protestantism and Catholicism resemble each other not only in that each is a form of social power, but also in that each places similar restrictions on female behavior."<sup>27</sup>

Surveillance also characterizes *Villette's* Catholic culture. Madame Beck spies constantly on her pupils and teachers, duplicating the keys to Lucy's dresser, examining her clothing, and reading her letters. Paul Emanuel too spies on the students and the teachers from his room in the building next door, and occasionally enters the garden of the girls' school through a secret door. Throughout the novel, spying and surveillance are represented as instruments of social control in Roman Catholic society, necessary in the absence of the internal self-discipline that characterizes the English Protestant. Lucy observes, "Foreigners say that it is only English girls who can thus be trusted to travel alone, and deep is their wonder at the daring confidence of English parents and guardians" (V, 6.72).

Brontë's representation of Catholicism's reliance on surveillance is founded on the Protestant idea that "ecclesiastical authority stifles the activity of conscience."<sup>28</sup> As the Reformation had begun with efforts to reform lay piety, and to reject the two-speed system that Catholicism represented, this Protestant "generalization of moral demands involved . . . placing high moral demands on one's own life" (S, 82). The ethic of Protestant self-discipline also draws more deeply upon

a “disenchantment” of the social imaginary which entails the “loss of the sense that there is a limit in principle to the malleability of people, to the advancement of the higher over the lower” (S, 125). The sense that there are no limits to potential human improvement fostered the development of a post-Reformation ethic of rational control, and a new confidence in the ability of individuals to put order into their lives.<sup>29</sup> This is why, Brontë suggests, Catholic parents can only “wonder at the daring confidence” that Protestants place in their children.

A central symbol in *Villette*, brilliantly deployed by Brontë, is the Buried Nun. The Pensionnat is housed in what was once a convent, and its architecture echoes medieval usages: “a series of the queerest little dormitories—which . . . had once been nuns’ cells: . . . the oratory—a long, low, gloomy room, where a crucifix hung, pale, against the wall, and two tapers kept dim vigils” (V, 8.92–93). In an adjoining garden grows an ancient tree, beneath which lies a nun who had been buried alive centuries ago for breaking one of her vows, presumably the vow of chastity. According to legend, the nun does not lie peacefully in her grave, but emerges in ghostly form from time to time.

Symbolically the nun represents forbidden desire, but as a key element of the Gothic atmosphere of the novel, she also suggests an enchanted universe in which irrational and supernatural forces are at work in the material world. The fact that she appears in moments when Lucy struggles with her own passions, as when she reads her first letter from Dr. John, which she will later bury under the same tree, heightens the nun’s symbolic value as marker of Desire. Lucy fears that the nun may be harbinger of madness, and asks Dr. John, “You think, then, . . . she came out of my brain, . . . and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her?” (V, 22.358). In the post-Reformation, rational order in which the self is (in Taylor’s word) “buffered” (S, 27) from being impinged upon by ghosts and spirits, such an apparition will be dismissed by Dr. John, who tells Lucy that the cause must lie within: “the result of long-continued mental conflict” and that “a cheerful mind [is] the preventive” (V, 22.358).

When Paul Emanuel, however, asks Lucy, “Mademoiselle, do you Protestants believe in the supernatural?” Lucy cautiously puts forth all the naturalistic explanations at her command—“a difference of theory and belief,” “I am constitutionally nervous,” “it has happened to me to experience impressions”—until finally she admits, “I too have seen it.” Paul declares that there is a rapport between Lucy and himself: “you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike—there is affinity.” Paul declares that whether the nun be flesh

and blood or something that remains when flesh and blood are gone, he means to “follow up the mystery” (V, 31.531–33).

Thus, it is what Lucy regards as a superstitious and sensual Catholicism that enables Paul to follow up the mystery of the ghost and to perceive the desire burning below Lucy’s well-regulated surface. The Catholic perspective, with its greater openness to enchantment and the irrational, makes it possible to explore phenomena that may lie in either the material, the psychological, or the supernatural realms, and accounts both for greater expression of sensual pleasure (the brightly colored silken dresses) and stricter external controls on behavior (the surveillance). This is why Lucy’s lace collar and pale pink dress loom so large in the narrative; while John does not even notice these subtle expressions of female sexuality, to Paul they reveal the truth of Lucy’s vibrant inner life. While, as Rosemary Clark-Beattie points out, Dr. John “will not respect a woman who expresses passion directly,” Monsieur Paul constantly encourages (or provokes) Lucy to express her feelings, including finally her need for love, her fear of being undesirable because not beautiful, and the passion simmering beneath her controlled, glacial surface.<sup>30</sup>

The association between repressed desire and the buried nun is heightened later in the novel when Lucy learns that the beloved woman of Paul Emanuel’s youth, Justine, immured herself (as Lucy would see it) in a convent, and remains enshrined in Paul Emanuel’s heart as a kind of saintly inspiration. Lucy’s desires lie, not in withdrawal from the world, but in the realm sanctified in the Protestant vision, that of ordinary daily life, with its pleasures and cares, and her relationship with Paul Emanuel is in one sense a struggle to free him from his submission to the spiritual authority of his priest, and from his monk-like devotion to an idealized image of a long-dead, ordinary human woman.

Lucy’s confession is a pivotal scene in the novel. Left alone in the school when all other teachers and pupils have gone on vacation, Lucy sinks into what Brontë would call hypochondria (depression). In an incident that echoes Brontë’s experience in Brussels, Lucy enters a Catholic church and has her confession heard by Père Silas. Readers never learn what sins (if any) Lucy has confessed, but Brontë presents the scene in terms that are psychological rather than spiritual; thus she uses the much-reviled image of the Catholic confessional, stripping it of the sacramental meaning it holds for Catholics, but giving it a measure of credibility as a refuge against loneliness and isolation (in Taylor’s terms, the isolation of the modern disembedded self). Here Brontë

directly confronts the differences in the way confession is viewed by Catholics and Protestants. In the Catholic view, the power to forgive sins has been passed down from Christ through Peter to the current Pope and to every ordained priest. For Protestants, private auricular confession represents an unwarranted, even unholy, intrusion into the individual conscience and the soul's relationship to God. Anti-Catholic literature was filled with dire warnings that the priest would abuse the power of the confessional.

The inward struggle that drives Lucy to the confessional consists of two elements: first, her deep loneliness, and second, her love for Dr. John, whom she has recognized as the Graham Bretton of her early years in England—a love that she must repress, as Dr. John is at this point infatuated with Ginevre, and Lucy knows that he can never, in any case, care for her. During the confession, Père Silas attempts to convert Lucy to Catholicism. Lucy speculates that, had she given in, she might have ended her days in a convent. Her fears evoke Kingsley's portrait of Conrad's relationship with Elizabeth of Hungary, and, of course, recall the novel's images of nuns buried alive by Catholicism's renunciatory demands. These demands caused the live burial of the nun in the garden, and they persevere, centuries later, to dominate the lives of Paul's fiancée, Justine, and of Paul himself. Père Silas expresses the Catholic ideal to Lucy: "Holy men have bidden penitents like you to hasten their path upward by penance, self-denial, and difficult good works. . . . [D]epend upon it our faith alone could heal and help you—Protestantism is altogether too dry, cold, prosaic for you" (V, 15.227). In a sense, he is right: Lucy conceals a passionate nature beneath her rational, disciplined, British exterior, as Paul Emanuel repeatedly points out, and she has the capacity for extreme sacrifice. What Lucy does not acknowledge, although the narrative reveals it repeatedly, is that she is as much bound to a rule of celibacy as was the Buried Nun, a rule that is in her case required by Protestant insistence on social order and self-discipline. Thus, while Lucy rejects the "mystical lattice" of the confessional (V, 36.592), her reliance on reason will also prove inadequate to the difficulties of her situation.

When Lucy leaves the confessional, she comments that she would as soon have accepted the priest's offer to meet again as she would "have thought of walking into a Babylonish furnace." However, she concludes, "whatever most of his brethren may be, and whatever I may think of his Church and creed (and I like neither), of himself I must ever retain a grateful recollection" (V, 15.228). Shortly after the confession, when Lucy faints and wakes to find herself at "La Terrasse,"



reunited with Graham and his mother in their home, she “entreated Reason” for strength to contain her overflowing feelings and to be satisfied with the very moderate affection that the Brettons will offer. She then steeps the pillow with her tears. Of this night’s entreaties and tears, Lucy reflects:

These struggles with the natural character, the strong native bent of the heart, may seem futile and fruitless, but in the end they do good. They tend, however, slightly, to give the actions, the conduct, that turn which Reason approves, and which Feeling, perhaps, too often opposes: they certainly make a difference in the general tenor of a life, and enable it to be better regulated, more equable, quieter on the surface; and it is on the surface only the common gaze will fall. As to what lies below, leave that with God. Man, your equal, weak as you, and not fit to be your judge, may be shut out thence: take it to your Maker—show Him the secrets of the spirit He gave . . . pray with faith for light in darkness. (V, 17.255)

In her fine analysis of this passage, Clark-Beattie points out that Lucy explicitly rejects the doctrines that underwrite the confessional as an element of Catholic practices: when Lucy rejects “man, your equal, . . . [as] not fit to be your judge,” she in effect denies the “claims of the priesthood to express God’s judgement.”<sup>31</sup> The central question is whether the private conscience or the Church is the correct moral guide. Paul’s Catholic view may be summed up in the words of Newman, who in an 1849 sermon entitled “Faith and Private Judgement” stated: “Has faith changed its meaning, or is it less necessary now? . . . And [Protestants] have it not . . . because . . . they consider their own reason better than any one’s else; they will not admit that any one comes from God who contradicts their own view of truth.”<sup>32</sup> On the other side of the question, Lucy’s Protestant position is expressed by George Henry Lewes in an 1850 *Leader* article entitled “The Pope, or Free Thought?” which Brontë read and approved. Lewes wrote, “The master-principle of Protestantism . . . is the liberty of private judgement. It is the protest of the free Soul against the authority of man. . . . [M]en must declare themselves either for the Pope or for Free Thought.”<sup>33</sup>

In *Villette*, the romantic love between Lucy Snowe and Paul Emanuel, the “tiger-Jesuit” (V, 40.687), the man “tacitly vowed . . . to celibacy” (V, 36.593) is inseparable from the religious tension that keeps them always at odds. Finally, in a chapter entitled “The Apple of Discord,” Brontë brings this tension to a resolution, not complete



but sufficient to allow for the novel's conclusion and to suggest the deeper current of her thought. As Clark-Beattie notes, "The chapter . . . is a ritual drama controlled by the conventions of Victorian anti-Catholic literature."<sup>34</sup> The confrontation begins with a pamphlet on Romanism that Paul Emanuel has quietly introduced into Lucy's desk. After looking through it, Lucy comments, "I was amused with the gambols of this unlicked wolf-cub. . . . He that had written it was no bad man, and while perpetually betraying the trained cunning—the cloven hoof of his system—I should pause before accusing himself of insincerity" (V, 36.599).

Paul admits that he had hoped the pamphlet would touch Lucy's heart, for, he says, "My best friends point out danger, and whisper caution. . . . It is your religion, your strange, self-reliant, invulnerable creed. . . . your terrible proud, earnest Protestantism, there is the danger" (V, 36.605). Paul's characterization of Lucy's creed as self-reliant and invulnerable refers to the Protestant ideal that no being should come between a person and God: no priest, no confessor. To a Catholic such as Paul, Lucy's creed relies excessively on human interpretation that is subjective, limited, and prone to err. Lucy responds that she is not unchristian, not hard-hearted: "I would not trouble your faith; you believe in God and Christ and the Bible, and so do I" (V, 36.605). For a lesser novelist, Lucy's acknowledgement of three central beliefs held in common might serve as a resolution, but Brontë does not allow the discussion to close on so vague a note of reconciliation. She has too precise an understanding of the differences between the two forms of Christian faith, and so, Paul responds, "But *do* you believe in the Bible? Do you receive Revelation? What limits are there to the wild, careless daring of your country and sect?" (V, 36.605). Lucy believes that the Bible that she keeps under her pillow speaks directly to her; for Paul Emanuel, the Bible is to be interpreted through God's instruments: the Church, the Pope, and the Pope's delegates, the priests.

Paul undertakes to be Lucy's spiritual guide, and lends her more pamphlets, works designed to show "the fair side of Rome" (V, 36.608). However, Lucy sees only chains forged to bind men and women to servitude: "men were over-wrought and women most murderously sacrificed, and all laid down a world God made pleasant for his creatures' good, and took up a cross, monstrous in its galling weight, that they might serve Rome" (V, 36.608–09). What is at stake here is the Protestant vision of a naturalized universe, in which God wills only that which tends to human thriving. Lucy concludes, "It will not be. God is not with Rome" (V, 36.609), and reflects that it is well that God's

mercy is so great that it absolves even priests. Now Paul hopes that Lucy will be moved by the beauty of Catholic ceremony and ritual and takes her to see a solemn high Mass (in Latin) and a huge public procession, but these only reinforce her convictions:

I now perceived by contrast how severely pure was my own  
[Protestantism]. . . . how we kept fewer forms between us and God. . . .  
[how even] the prayer in a language learned and dead, harassed  
with hindrance a heart which only longed to cry—  
“God be merciful to me a sinner!” (V, 36.610–11)

The essential difference between Paul and Lucy here is that to Paul, Church ceremonies represent the holy. For Catholics, Taylor writes, “God’s power is somehow concentrated in certain people, times, places or actions. . . . Churches were holy places made more so by the presence of relics; feasts were holy times, and the sacraments of the church were holy actions, which supposed a clergy with special powers.” For Protestants, such “church-controlled magic” seems “an abomination . . . idolatry in the sight of God” (S, 76). Brontë’s chapter concludes on a note of harmony, with Paul telling Lucy, “Believe then, what you can” and reflecting that “as Time is not for God, nor Space, so neither is Measure, nor Comparison” and what matters to God is “the truth and faith of one mind *according to the light He has appointed*” (V, 36.611–12, emphasis added). Whatever the faith, Brontë suggests, it has been divinely ordained.

Toward the end of the novel, Lucy attends an evening festival that serves, in the symbolic framework of the novel, as a carnivalesque public performance that unmasks deeper forces impinging on Lucy’s life in Paul’s conspiracy with Père Silas, and that catapults Lucy, who is in a drugged state, into a dream-like realm of imagination, impetuosity, irrepressible emotions, and strange new perspectives. As rational self-control drops away, she finds herself “on the brink of frenzy” (V, 38.660). While she lived in Brussels, Brontë had attended a Carnival with Constantine Heger and another student. In a letter to Ellen Nussey, Charlotte dismissed the Carnival as “nothing but masking and mum[m]ery,” but the Carnavalesque plays a more significant role in the narrative than Brontë’s letter would suggest.<sup>35</sup> In the novel, Madame Beck secretly gives Lucy, who is distraught at the idea that Monsieur Paul has left Villette without even saying goodbye to her, “a strong opiate” to make her sleep. Rather than falling asleep, Lucy’s brain is over-stimulated, “Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous,” and Lucy leaves the intolerably “nar-

row limits” of her convent-dormitory for the city (V, 38.651). Lucy comes across a midnight fête in the Haute-Ville, “a strange scene, stranger than dreams,” “a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous” (V, 38.654–55). This is no dream, however, and she witnesses a gathering of the principal characters of the novel into two groups, with herself, significantly, as unrecognized outsider.

Lucy’s experience of the fête is determined primarily by her state of mind. In reality, it is not a celebration of “chaos” as Lucy at first imagines (V, 38.656), and as many Carnivals are, but rather a civic commemoration. It represents community, not anarchy, a festival, not a feast of misrule. But Lucy experiences this fête in a disoriented opium-dream state that evokes the Carnival, an ancient tradition that is still important today in Roman Catholic cultures. For a moment, time seems to revert to a pre-Christian past, as the familiar park appears composed “of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphinx” (V, 38.655).

As Taylor notes, Carnivals serve several functions. They represent a way for the irrational element of human nature to “let off steam” (S, 49) before returning to the disciplined, workaday world, or before beginning the Lenten fast. More importantly, the Carnival represents an acknowledgement of the wild and the demonic in human life—an acceptance that these can never be entirely driven out—a giving the cravings of the flesh their due. Carnival represents an older order, that of the enchanted universe, in which the grotesque, the fantastic, and the dreamlike impinge on our rational, disciplined daytime selves. And finally, by demonstrating that “the past which our modern narratives tell us is firmly behind us cannot thus simply be abandoned,” the Carnival suggests that advances in the long process of cultural evolution have as an unintended consequence “crushed or sidelined important facets of spiritual life, which had in fact flourished in earlier ‘paganisms,’ for all their faults” (S, 770–71).

Just as Catholicism represents a separation between sacred and profane, “a separate sphere of the ‘spiritual’ . . . outside the saeculum,” so too does it keep alive another “alternation, between order and anti-order, which Carnival represented.” After the Reformation’s “frontal attack on the dualism itself,” Carnivals were banished, and there remained “just this one relentless order of right thought and action, which must occupy all social and personal space” (S, 266). On the surface, Lucy’s narrative validates the latter, the order of right thought and action, but the deeper tensions of the book validate the acceptance of passion and social nonconformity, of anti-order, and the close of the novel seems to say, not one or the other, but both.

#### IV. VILLETTE'S SECULARISM

Fundamental to the development of secularism is the gradual but very broad shift in our social imaginary that replaces the concept of an enchanted cosmos with that of a naturalized universe. To summarize Taylor, in an enchanted cosmos (the remnants of which are represented in *Villette* by Roman Catholicism), actions and objects are endowed with sacred powers, priests represent a "special vocation" that gives them divine authority over the lives of ordinary people, and religious devotion involves sacrificing comfort and even well-being for an idea of the good. In the new order, a disenchanted universe is understood to be governed by natural laws, originally established by God, that proceed now of their own accord, a universe in which God is not to be swayed or controlled by rituals, relics, penances, petitions, or indulgences. In this view, God gave humans reason and the power to understand and use the laws of nature so that they could shape their own lives and bring about the fulfillment of God's will, which consists of individual human thriving, and the improvement of society.

*Villette* takes place in a world that, for Lucy Snowe, is disenchanted. Spirits and "magic," aligned with rituals and relics and other rites, Lucy deems superstitious: to her, "the fruits of Rome . . . [are] ignorance, abasement, and bigotry" (V, 36.608). But Brontë brilliantly makes use of elements of the Gothic tradition, represented by the nun's ghost, the carnivalesque, and exploration of female desire and fear of mental breakdown, to allow the approach of the non-rational, the supernatural, and the passionate into the empirical-scientific, disciplined, and reasonable world of Lucy Snowe and, by extension, the world of English Protestantism. In *Villette*, the enchanted world exists side-by-side with the disenchanted world, just as Monsieur Paul is brought to acknowledge the "fitness" of Lucy's religion for her, for who she is, and to say, "Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for Lucy" (V, 42.713).

Lucy and Paul represent two different world views; each has been inextricably bound up in and profoundly shaped by his or her religious heritage. While for Lucy, the differences between Protestant denominations are "faults of form; incumbrances, and trivialities" (V, 36.607), the differences between Protestant and Catholic are profound, and central to the novel: two very different, even at times irreconcilable ways to apprehend the divine. As a whole, the novel establishes the equivalent of a secular world view; its Protestant/Catholic dialectic is resolved in a way that parallels the historical development of a secular

culture in which deep faiths of radically differing kinds are able to co-exist within a public sphere that is more than tolerant: a secularism that offers multiple versions of human spirituality, multiple ways in which the holy may be acknowledged, or not. In *Villette*, Brontë anticipates a previously unimaginable “pluralism of outlooks”—not just of Catholic and Protestant, but also of “religious and non- and anti-religious” (S, 437). By creating an imaginative world in which love and marriage are possible for Paul and Lucy, Brontë anticipates a “new placement of the sacred or spiritual in relation to individual and social life” (S, 437).

Brontë would not have thought of herself as an advocate of secularism. But she sometimes evinced an open-minded stance toward religious questions that anticipates the revolution in moral and spiritual horizons that characterizes contemporary life. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë creates a dialectic between two alternative religious systems, one Christian and the other pre-Christian, represented by Mary and Diana Rivers and by the Cinderella sub-text, to suggest a matriarchal counterpoint to patriarchal Christianity.<sup>36</sup> In *Shirley*, she inserts a feminist critique of traditional Biblical hermeneutics: in the words of Shirley Keeldar, when John Milton “tried to see the first woman. . . . It was his cook he saw.”<sup>37</sup> In *Villette* she suggests that one day all Protestant denominations might merge “into one grand Holy Alliance” (V, 36.607). In 1850, Colby points out, she wrote to Lewes “that the church can do its work ‘quite as well in a curate’s plain clothes as in a cardinal’s robes and hat.’”<sup>38</sup> And Brontë courageously opposed her father and friends who did not wish her to visit Harriet Martineau, an avowed atheist, writing to Miss Wooler in January 1853 that “I believe that if you were in my place, and knew Miss Martineau as I do—if you had shared with me the proofs of her rough but genuine kindness . . . you would be the last to give her up; you would separate the sinner from the sin.”<sup>39</sup>

In response to Victorian debates between Protestantism and Catholicism, *Villette* offers an open-ended conclusion that comprehends the opposition between the two religions in a single, inclusive worldview. The indeterminate conclusion to the novel is more than a concession to Patrick Brontë’s request that Charlotte not make the novel end unhappily: it signifies by its openness a future that is still working itself out, a dialectic of ideas that continues to have its effect in the readers’ and the culture’s expanding horizons of available meanings.<sup>40</sup> That humans have devised more than one way to express their sense of the holy does not nullify either its meaning or existence. As Charlotte’s sister Emily wrote in her 1848 poem “No Coward Soul”:

Vain are the thousand creeds  
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,  
Worthless as withered weeds  
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one  
Holding so fast by thy infinity  
So surely anchored on  
The steadfast rock of Immortality.<sup>41</sup>

*Loyola University of Chicago*

NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Melnyk, "Introduction," *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers*, ed. Melnyk (New York: Garland, 1998), xii.

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Colby, *Fiction With a Purpose: Major and Minor Nineteenth-Century Novels* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967), 210, 211.

<sup>3</sup> Diana Peschier, *Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholic Discourses: The Case of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Macmillan, 2005), 91. Peschier provides an overview of the criticism that tends predominantly, but with many nuances and gradations, toward an interpretation of *Villette* as anti-Catholic (7–9). These studies include Robert Bernard Martin, *The Accents of Persuasion: Charlotte Brontë's Novels* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966); Tom Winnifrieth, *The Brontës and Their Background, Romance and Reality* (Basingstoke Hants: Macmillan, 1988); Patricia Duncker, *Writing on the Wall* (London: Pandora, 2002); Gayla McGlamery, "'This Unlicked Wolf Cub': Anti-Catholicism in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* 37 (1993): 55–71; and Lyndall Gordon, *Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Buried Life of Lucy Snowe: *Villette*," in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), 399–440; 414. The passage is taken from the following context:

Nothing is more irritating to some readers than the anti-Papist prejudice of *Villette*. But for Brontë, obsessively concerned with feelings of unreality and duplicity, Catholicism seems to represent the institutionalization of Lucy's internal schisms, permitting sensual indulgence by way of counterpoise to jealous spiritual restraint (chap. 14) and encouraging fervent zeal by means of surveillance or privation. . . . [S]he sees Catholicism as slavery. But precisely because Catholicism represents a sort of sanctioned schizophrenia, she finds herself attracted to it, and in her illness she kneels on the stone pavement in a Catholic church. Inhabiting the nun's walk,

she has always lived hooded in gray to hide the zealot within (chap. 22). Now, seeking refuge within the confessional, she turns to this opening for community and communication which are as welcome to her “as bread to one in extremity of want.” (414–15)

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1994), 719. According to Colby, reviews in the *Guardian*, the *English Churchman*, and the *Christian Remembrancer* also found the anti-Catholicism of *Villette* objectionable, but at least one reviewer commended the author for the novel's absence of “bigotry or ranting against Catholicism” (*The Atlas* [12 February 1853]: 106); quoted in Colby, 187, 339n24, 339n25.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Peschier, 139.

<sup>7</sup> The other favorable portrait of a Jesuit in Victorian literature is William Makepeace Thackeray's portrait of Father Holt in *Henry Esmond*, portions of which Charlotte read in manuscript form during the writing of *Villette*. See Barker, 693; Colby, 183–84.

<sup>8</sup> Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Michael E. Schiefelbein, *The Lure of Babylon: Seven Protestant Novelists and Britain's Roman Catholic Revival* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 2001), 141.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Wang, “Unveiling the Hidden God of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*,” *Literature and Theology* 15 (2001): 342–357; 342.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 2. Hereafter abbreviated S and cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>12</sup> See Sheridan Gilley, “Roman Catholicism,” in *Nineteenth-Century English Religious Traditions: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. D. G. Paz (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 37–38.

<sup>13</sup> See Taylor, 529.

<sup>14</sup> Winnifreth and Edward Chitham, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 28.

<sup>15</sup> See Barker, 157–58.

<sup>16</sup> Schiefelbein, 2–3. See Schiefelbein's discussion of nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism, including chapter 5, “A Catholic Baptism for *Villette*'s Lucy Snowe” (129–142), which argues that the seven authors he discusses, Walter Scott, Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, Frances Trollope, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Kingsley, and George Eliot, all represent a conflicted response to Roman Catholicism: not only do their novels echo and reinforce popular anti-Catholic bias, they also express their authors' attraction to certain aspects of Catholicism. I am grateful to Mark Bosco, S.J., for giving me a copy of this book years ago, and instigating my thinking on this topic.

<sup>17</sup> See Walter Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1982), 5–7, 40, 45, 48, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (1853; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), chapter 36, page 610. Hereafter abbreviated V and cited parenthetically by chapter and page number.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret M. Maison, *The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 171. Quoted in Schiefelbein, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Peschier, 140–41.

<sup>21</sup> Peschier, 69.

<sup>22</sup> Melnyk, *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 44, 46.

<sup>23</sup> Gilley, 33.



<sup>24</sup> Henry Edward Manning, *Sermons on Ecclesiastical Subjects*, 3 vol. (Dublin: James Duffy, 1863), 1:60. Quoted in Arnstein, 60–61 and 233n89.

<sup>25</sup> See Peschier, 5–9; Colby, 204; and Toni Wein, “Gothic Desire in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*,” *Studies in English Literature* 39 (1999): 733–46, esp. 734–36.

<sup>26</sup> David Hume, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, section 9, paragraph 219; in Hume, *Enquiries*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 269–70. Quoted in Taylor, 263.

<sup>27</sup> Rosemary Clark-Beattie, “Fables of Rebellion: Anti-Catholicism and the Structure of *Villette*,” *ELH* 53 (1986): 821–46; 841, 829–30.

<sup>28</sup> Clark-Beattie, 833.

<sup>29</sup> See Taylor, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Clark-Beattie, 838.

<sup>31</sup> Clark-Beattie, 824.

<sup>32</sup> John Henry Newman, “Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations: Discourse X: Faith and Private Judgement” (1849), in *English Prose of the Victorian Era*, ed. Charles Frederick Harrold and William D. Templeman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938), 564.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Clark-Beattie, 823.

<sup>34</sup> Clark-Beattie, 841.

<sup>35</sup> Barker, 420.

<sup>36</sup> See my “Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and the Grimms’ Cinderella: Fairy Tale as Feminist Allegory,” *Studies in English Literature* 40 (2000): 695–710.

<sup>37</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (1849; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), book 2, chapter 7, page 359.

<sup>38</sup> Colby, 185.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Barker, 709.

<sup>40</sup> For Patrick’s request, see Barker, 723.

<sup>41</sup> Emily Brontë, *The Poems of Emily Brontë*, ed. Derek Roper with Edward Chitham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), page 183, lines 9–16.