

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Tallon Kennedy for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on May 28, 2020.

Title: Queer Materiality: Freaks, Ghosts, and Madness in Victorian Culture and the Novels of Charlotte Brontë

Abstract approved:

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Megan Ward

This thesis offers a theory of *queer materiality* as a way of understanding the interconnectedness of freaks, ghosts, and madness in Victorian culture, and how these elements coalesce in Victorian literature to destabilize the knowable materiality of normative social structures and forms of embodiment, leading to the production of queer material worlds. Queer materiality is my term for a theory of perception and embodiment that is historically specific to the mid-nineteenth century: it denotes a gap between the material and immaterial— a bridging of a binary logic that attempts to constitute matter, both of bodies and of objects, as either present or absent— an idea that finds embodiment in the figure of the ghost. Additionally, it underscores the way that freak shows and madness posed real and haunting threats to the stable materiality of the normative social order, as these revealed that beneath the veneer of genteel Victorian society lurked things queer, mad, and freakish. In the mid-nineteenth century, bodies are not in fact perceived as stable material realities; instead, as a result of the expanse of empire and its intimate contact with “Othered” bodies, and as a result of the anxieties that the freak show stoked, such as the need to

produce “normal” and “abnormal” embodiment as visibly differentiated, the contours of the Victorian body/mind wavers at its edges, threatening to materialize as a ghostly abnormality. The first half of this thesis fleshes out the theory of queer materiality through cultural research on the freak show to show how the exhibition of nonwhite, disabled, queer, and mad bodies haunts normative embodiment and destabilizes knowable material reality. I show the applicability of this theory through a reading of *Jane Eyre*'s (1848) Bertha Mason as a “mad freak” whose haunting presence in Thornfield Hall destabilizes the bourgeois home and threatens to materialize Jane and Rochester's normative body/minds as mad and disabled. Afterwards, the second half of this thesis pivots into a consideration of the significance of queer materiality to queer, mad Victorian subjects— how queer materiality creates the possibility for queer, mad resistance and the materialization of queer worlds. I exhibit this through a reading of Charlotte Brontë's final novel, *Villette* (1853), showing how Lucy Snowe's melancholy and ghost-seeing mad senses allow her to create queerly material spaces outside of the surveilling techniques of disciplinary power, where her queer thoughts and feelings can exist as a queer materiality that connects her to other queer subjects across the strictures of normative linear space and time.

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Queer Materiality: Freaks, Ghosts, and Madness  
in Victorian Culture and the Novels of Charlotte Brontë

by  
Tallon Kennedy

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Tallon Kennedy, Author

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## DEDICATION

To my Father, Robert Kennedy, and to my Mother, Tennile Noble,  
for bringing me into this world, for accepting me for who I am, for  
everything they've ever done for me, and will do.

## PREFACE

I'd like to begin where I think all writing, research, and thinking should begin: the personal. This thesis will act as a culmination of my critical and scholarly interests of the last four years, but in that time, I have never lost sight of how those interests have always directly arisen from, and been thoroughly entangled with, my embodied experience. So, in order to tell the story of why this master's thesis focuses on the queer, the mad, the freaky, the ghostly, Victorian culture and Charlotte Brontë, I must first tell you the story of the self.

My interest with Charlotte Brontë began in my undergraduate literature program when I had to read *Jane Eyre* for a class. I fell in love with the novel in a way I never had before from the opening pages. There was something about Jane's unwillingness to withstand silently her oppression at Gateshead and Lowood, her fiery acts of rebellion against the authorities above her, that I needed in my life at the time. And there was too the romantic drama between Jane and Mr. Rochester that tugged at my naïve heartstrings— you see, I was a queer kid whose only experience of love at the time was unrequited feelings towards the straight men around me, so when Jane made it seem an impossibility that a gentile man like Rochester could ever love a lowly servant like her, that sense of an impossible love due to social circumstance spoke to me in a visceral way. The pain Jane felt was my pain refracted through a century-and-a-half of distance. When we finally get to her famous declaration, "Reader, I married him," it felt to me like a statement that impossible queer love could be made possible. By the time I read that final chapter, I was desperately in love with a straight friend of mine. It was the night of Halloween, 2015— my friends were all going out to parties and drinking, meanwhile I chose to spend the night curled up in my bed, reading over and over again the scene where Jane hears a supernatural voice calling her back to Rochester and she goes to him, and I cried and I cried, as this

connection I felt with Jane gave me hope that, one day, I too could be loved and deserving of love.

But there was something else brewing in the back of my mind as well: the book was haunting me. Or rather, I should say that the ghosts of *Jane Eyre* became a fascination for me. It's a constant throughout the novel— from Jane's confrontation with the ghost of her Uncle in the Red Room, to the appearance of the ghostly Bertha Mason, to the supernatural voice that calls Jane back to Rochester, to the blinded Rochester's wondering whether or not Jane is real or spirit upon her return to him. In my undergraduate work I became obsessed with tracing representations of "spectral women," like Jane and Bertha, across Victorian literature as it appeared a common theme. Bertha Mason would become especially perplexing to me, for she was not only a "ghost," but she also seemed to haunt the novel itself— pushed to the margins, represented as wild and mad, her story told secondhand through the unreliable speechifying of Rochester, locked in an attic and her fiery death told in retrospect. It wouldn't be until I got to graduate school and took a class connecting Bertha Mason's appearance in the novel to the nineteenth-century freak show that I would begin to make sense of her representation, and Chapter One of this thesis centers its attention on Bertha Mason and the haunting "mad freaks" of the nineteenth-century.

In the summer of 2016, I would read Charlotte Brontë's later and final novel, *Villette*. Somehow, this novel would come to mean even more to me personally than *Jane Eyre* did. Never before had I read a novel that seemed to reflect back to me the same feelings I felt— Lucy Snowe's writing about her melancholia in the book to this day represents more accurately my own experiences with depression than anything else I've ever read or written. And, just as I read *Jane Eyre* during a time in my life that felt uncannily apropos, so too would I read *Villette* at a

time that the novel seemed to speak into existence my own life, feelings, and pain. By the time I would read *Villette*, my love for the straight friend had waned, indeed revealed to me as an illusion— not love for another person, but rather, a futile attempt at assuaging my loneliness, a battle not independent from my struggles with mental health, both of which have haunted me since high school. This was a queer loneliness— in high school, I found myself, as countless queer people have, ostracized from those around me. I would lose almost my entire friend group and support network when I came out as gay, or otherwise I would lose friends because I was “too depressed” anymore and it was a drag to be around me.

When I got to college, I would fare better at making lasting friendships, but I still felt unexplainably excluded from the social world around me. I could never fit in with the “boys” in the dorms, and I could never fit in with the “girls” either. Even with my friends, who were almost all straight and cisgender, I would feel, sometimes, ghostly— a queer on the margins haunting the straight world, infiltrating the social spaces I’m not supposed to be in. Around this time, too, I would begin pushing against the boundaries of my gender identity, experimenting with makeup and clothes in a way I hadn’t before. The overwhelming anxiety of being in makeup and gender-bending clothes in public, of seeing people stare at me and feeling threatened by them, would lead me to abandon this path. Some days, I felt like a ghost when I wanted to be seen and loved, and other days I felt like a spectacle— a freak— when all I wanted was to slip by unnoticed.

So when I read *Villette*, and Lucy Snowe’s description of her loneliness, and the way her narration would often position her as merely an observer, a ghostly presence looking upon the happenings of a social world she has no business being in, it felt true to me. And when she falls in love with Dr. John as a last-ditch attempt to become legitimated by the normative social world

that excluded her, well that felt exactly like what I was subconsciously trying to do in loving my straight friend. When Lucy obsesses over the letters Dr. John writes to her, that felt to me like the obsession I poured over text messages from the object of my love. And when Lucy finally accepts that Dr. John will not love her, and buries his letters in the garden in mourning, that felt to me like my growing acceptance that the person I loved could never assuage the loneliness I felt, and that I could never fit in as a “normal” person in this world.

But after giving up Dr. John, Lucy finds M. Paul, a surly teacher at the boarding-school Lucy works at, and they fall into a tempestuous love that is driven apart by the institutional forces of the Catholic church and the boarding-school’s headmistress until, in the book’s final chapter, Lucy, in a dejected and heart-broken tone, hints at M. Paul’s death at sea. After giving up my Dr. John, I wouldn’t necessarily find my M. Paul, but something close enough— over the course of a year, the same year I would work on doing scholarship on *Villette* and Lucy Snowe’s queerness in order to write a sample for graduate school applications, I would fall madly, madly in love with a gay guy I had become close friends with. But he had a boyfriend. I kept my feelings a secret for a while, even as he continued to invite me to hang out at his place with his boyfriend and his other friends. The more I spent time around him, the more I fell, and the more I fell, the more I felt the need to be around him. More than that, eventually I had become friends with *his* friends and with *his* roommates, nearly all of whom were queer. For the first time in my life, I thought I had what I always wanted: a place of queer belonging. A friend group of queer people where I didn’t feel either invisibilized or freakified, but rather, like the others.

As I became further entangled in his friend group, I would come up against a dilemma— this sense of belonging I had found was only available through my love for and attachment to this guy who I wasn’t supposed to love, which itself felt like a cruel irony, as for the first time in

my life I had fallen in love with another queer person, and even then, this love was forbidden to me. I was falling in love like I never had before, and may never again— so deeply, so dangerously, that I was losing sense of myself, my anxiety about the situation and the (bittersweet) pain of it increasing each and every day. The tenuousness of the situation, and my growing desperation to keep this group of friends, and to keep my close friendship with this guy I loved despite its all-consuming weight on my psyche, would send me into a spiral. I was, quite literally, going mad.

The more this situation developed, and the more I continued doing research on *Villette*, the more the two seemed to converge. Lucy's inability to be with her true love because of forces outside of her control, her desperation as she watches her love be torn away from her, and the despair she falls into as a result, felt akin to my personal troubles. I eventually confessed my love to this person. We attempted to keep the friendship going for a few months longer, but the relationship would grow increasingly strained and tempestuous, until it reached a breaking point. In *Villette*, the breaking point comes when the headmistress, Madame Beck, drugs Lucy with opium to keep her docile and away from M. Paul. Rather than put Lucy in a stupor, the opium leads her to venturing outside the boarding-school in a dream-like trance. She moves like a ghost unseen through an unstable world until she comes upon Madame Beck and M. Paul in the park. In her drugged and maddened state, she believes she witnesses M. Paul become engaged to a bride-to-be (this is later revealed to be a false interpretation). Lucy concludes that she is sunk, that the love she wanted so badly will never be hers, and she heads back to the boarding-school heartbroken and inconsolable. In my breaking point, it was not opium, but acid. Stupidly, at a time when neither of us were in the right mental and emotional state to do so, the friend I loved and I dropped LSD together, and I too would experience my own drugged heartbreak, as we

wound up taking a walk together at night, and on one of the many bridges in Pittsburgh, he told me that he didn't want to be friends with me anymore. It felt like the world was breaking apart, like the stable materiality I once knew had given way to some haunting nightmare world.

The depression I was stuck in for months after this event was unlike any depression I'd experience prior to or since. I spent the vast majority of my time lying in bed, a habit I've yet to break to this day. I briefly broke a years-long caffeine addiction simply through being unable to walk downstairs to grab a cup of coffee. I listened to St. Vincent's twisted yet sweet *Masseduction* album on repeat: "Take my hand / from your hand / Leave you dancing / with a ghost." My thoughts were haunted by what-ifs: haunted by the things I could have done differently to save the friendship, haunted by the life that could have been but now could never be. And, worst of all, I now had to confront that loneliness I thought I had rid myself of, as I had lost this group of friends I felt I belonged in. I again felt my life had become rather queer precisely at the moment that I lost a queer support network. Where was I to fit, now? Who was I to be? I would again feel myself to be mad, ghostly, queer— a freak. I attempted to get psychiatric help during this period and got on a medicine regimen that I remain on to this day, but my experiences with psychiatry were, bluntly put, horrible. The way the psychiatrist talked down to me condescendingly, like a freak indeed I was, and implied that my feelings and behaviors were wholly irrational, like a madman indeed I was, became too much for me to bear. All of this is to say— when I write about Lucy Snowe's distrust of medical advice, her feelings of grief and queer loneliness, and her disorientation within the world around her, it is very personal for me, as I have lived it.

In focusing on Charlotte Brontë, I am not *necessarily* trying to reclaim Brontë as a queer or mad historical figure, and yet the question *has* crossed my mind as to whether or not Brontë

felt something adjacent to the feelings of queerness and madness I have experienced, given the novels she has written. There are certainly clues to how Brontë felt if we look at her life and the letters she wrote. It is well-established that *Villette* is more auto-biographical than her other works, and we can certainly see her own struggles with depressed spirits and spurned (queer?) love in her life. In her comprehensive biography of the Brontës, Juliet Barker notes that the scene in *Villette* in which Lucy Snowe goes to a Catholic confessional to find reprieve from her melancholic thoughts is paralleled with Brontë's own visit to a confessional in Brussels: "Being on her own at Roe Head for a few weeks over Easter had reduced Charlotte to mental and physical breakdown... That Charlotte should not only have been driven to visit a hated Catholic priest but also that she should have made 'a real confession' to him is an indication of her desperate state of mind. All her instincts told her that her growing obsession with a married man was totally reprehensible and she obviously needed to talk to someone" (497-498). It is not only Brontë's loneliness that drove her to mental breakdown, but perhaps a particularly queer loneliness—the loneliness that comes when one is in love, not merely with someone who can't or won't return that love, but in a love that is "totally reprehensible"—a love that cannot be expressed or spoken into existence within the strictures of the normative social order. The guilt of her "reprehensible" feelings, and the guilt of finding herself in a nervous breakdown, would lead her to conceal her sojourn to the Catholic confessional from her father, as she implored her sister Emily in a letter not tell him, for "He will not understand that it was only a *freak*" (qtd. in Barker 499; emphasis mine). Charlotte Brontë— queer, mad freak of the Victorian age?

It is the fears expressed above by Brontë that have come to structure the theoretical underpinnings and critical inquiries of this master's thesis—the all-pervasive fear in the Victorian era of becoming "mad," of becoming a "freak," and in our modern-day parlance:



queer. These fears of becoming “Other” would come to *haunt* the Victorian body/mind, and those who came to embody this “Otherness” would be perceived as uncanny, ghostly non-entities. We need not stray from Brontë’s life to see this— Brontë once wrote in a letter to her close friend Ellen Nussey, “I keep trying to do right, checking wrong feelings, repressing wrong thoughts— every instant I find— myself going astray— I have a constant tendency to scorn people who are far better than I am— A horror at the idea of becoming one of a certain set,” and in another letter to Ellen wrote, “I hope, I trust, I might one day become better, far better, than my evil wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit, and warm to the flesh will now permit me to be” (qtd. in Barker 330). In Brontë’s letters we see an overwhelming concern with policing her own thoughts, of keeping her body/mind in check, lest she “go astray” and “become one of a certain set,” an “Other” unable to line their thoughts and behaviors up with the normative; and, we also see here a concern that her “evil wandering thoughts” leave her “cold to the spirit,” perhaps an indication that she felt herself a dead, ghostly subject. That is certainly the conclusion that Elizabeth Gaskell came to when, in interviewing the Brontës’ servant Martha Brown for her biography of Charlotte, Brown recounted that her “heart ache[d]” each night upon hearing Charlotte Brontë’s solitary walks with the melancholy thoughts that kept her awake, and Gaskell responded: “I am sure I should fancy I heard the steps of the dead following me” (qtd. in Barker 873).

Brontë’s struggles with what she called “depressed spirits” would continue for the rest of her life, and particularly when she was writing *Villette*. In letters written while she was working on the novel, Brontë would lament “My nervous system is soon wrought on,” “the renewal of remembrances brought back the pang of bereavement and occasioned a depression of spirits well nigh intolerable— for one or two nights I scarcely knew how to get on till morning— when

morning came I was still *haunted* with a sense of sickening distress,” “Late in the evenings and all through the nights— I fall into a condition of mind which turns entirely to the Past— to Memory, and Memory is both sad and relentless. This will never do” (qtd. in Barker 767, 775, 776; emphasis mine). The mental pain that Brontë experiences here, including her feeling of being *haunted* by distress, her guilt at having “freak” moments of despondency, and the guilt she feels in loving whom it is reprehensible to love, are constitutive of my points of critical inquiry in attending to the novels of Brontë. In this thesis, I look at freaks, ghosts, and madness in Victorian culture and Brontë’s novels in order to come to an understanding of how these cultural phenomena were all interconnected at mid-century as “queer material” that threatened the stability of normative body/minds and realities. This threatened stable materiality can be glimpsed in Brontë’s statement that her condition of mind turns her toward the sad, relentless past— the temporal ruptures of madness open up possibilities for queer connection across time and space, a reconstruction of material worlds that creates space for queer existence.

My life and my scholarly work presented herein have been an act of making space for mad, queer existence. I hope that I have created the necessary tools and language for others like me to find connection in spite of the loneliness of this material world. The conclusion of *Villette* spares us from Lucy’s newest trauma and heartbreak: “Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope... Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life” (546). There is enough said. Let us picture a happy succeeding life where queer, mad love and kinship materializes as the new “normal.”

## INTRODUCTION

In *Extraordinary Bodies*, disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes that the nineteenth century freak show was fundamental in constructing the social boundaries around what types of bodies were viewed and treated as normal versus those that were seen as aberrant and freakish— extraordinary. “Freak shows framed and choreographed bodily differences that we now call ‘race,’ ‘ethnicity,’ and ‘disability’ in a ritual that enacted the social process of making cultural otherness from the raw materials of human physical variation” (60). According to Garland-Thomson, the freak show functioned through a “visual apprehension” of the body and the construction of social codes: “the exhibited body became a text written in boldface to be deciphered according to the needs and desires of the onlookers” (60). It is the body as text to be deciphered through the mode of visual epistemology that comes to structure the delimitation of the normative and the acceptable in nineteenth century culture; and as Garland-Thomson has pointed out, these demarcations of bodily difference through the freak show persist in the present-day as ways of defining and identifying bodies through race and disability. But as this thesis goes on to argue, the freak show and the way it delineated the boundaries of embodiment were additionally inseparable from nineteenth century formations of queerness and madness.

As Garland-Thomson has noted, the freak show was imbued with desire, largely attributing the ability *to* desire with the onlookers whose multiple, normative gazes were pulled toward the freak on display. To watch the freak show was to simultaneously desire both contact with, and distinction from, the freak; and importantly, it was the *materiality* of the freak show—the irrefutable reality of coming into visual contact with the “Othered” freak—that legitimated this desire. As Garland-Thomson writes, “The body’s material authority provides a seemingly

irrefutable foundation upon which the prevailing power relations can thus be erected. The figure of the freak is consequently the necessary cultural compliment to... the normative position of masculine, white, nondisabled, sexually unambiguous [we might rewrite this to say heterosexual and cisgendered], and middle class” (64). In other words, the desire stoked by the freak show materializes as a set of power relations that hierarchizes the normative over that which is designated as the “freakish”; and in doing so, the materiality of those power relations becomes hypothetically solidified— it becomes an apparent fact that the bodies on display are aberrations, oddities to be conjured for the sake of solidifying these power relations and then disappeared from “civilized” society, like ghosts. Garland-Thomson writes, “Safely domesticated and bounded by the show’s forms and conventions, the freak show soothes the onlookers’ self-doubt by appearing as their antithesis” (65). And so, the structure of the freak show as an apparitional spectacle comes to soothe the onlookers’ anxiety that they are, in fact, “normal.”

But what happens when the ghost refuses to dissipate? What happens when the freaky apparition is unleashed from the domesticated safety of the freak show? What occurs when the “Othered” freak— the nonwhite, the disabled, the mad, the queer<sup>1</sup>— is a haunting and destabilizing presence within the “normative” material world? Indeed, Garland-Thomson points to this possibility when she writes that “Freaks embodied the threat of individuation running rampant into chaos... the freak show symbolically contained the potential threat that difference among the polity might erupt as anarchy... The spectator was at once shaken by the limitless

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<sup>1</sup> My collapsing of these terms and identifications under the sign of “freak” isn’t merely a convenience, but rather holds historical precedence as this thesis will go on to show; for, as Garland-Thomson points out, “the freak show’s most remarkable effect was to eradicate distinctions among a wide variety of bodies, conflating them under the sign of the freak-as-other” (62). One of the main goals and hopes of this thesis and its research is to build bridges and close gaps between areas of study in social justice through showing how, historically speaking, the disempowered subjects of colonialism and heterosexual patriarchy share a common root in being deemed “freaks” to be abjected from the construction of the “normative, civilized, and sane” society.

possibilities unleashed by the freak’s anarchic body” (66). Thus, at the same time that the freak show was constructed to contain bodily difference, it also highlighted and stoked the prevailing cultural anxiety that beneath the veneer of the normative— in fact beneath the veneer of a stable and knowable materiality of the body, the mind, and the social world— lie the haunting truth of freakishness: a queer world where madness would reign.<sup>2</sup>

*Queer materiality* is my term for a theory of perception and embodiment that is historically specific to the mid-nineteenth century. The “queer” of queer materiality is meant to signify several things: first, it denotes a gap between the material and immaterial, a bridging of a binary logic that attempts to constitute matter, both of bodies and of objects, as either present or absent. Additionally, it underscores the way that the queer and the freaky posed a real and haunting threat to the stable materiality of the normative social order. In this thesis, I argue for a queer materiality of the Victorian body/mind<sup>3</sup> that understands the body as always undergoing a process of materialization. In the mid-nineteenth century, in contradiction with the idea that the freak show would have a mollifying and pacifying affect that stabilizes the normative, bodies are not in fact perceived as stable material realities; instead, as a result of the expanse of empire and

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<sup>2</sup> As I will show in Chapter One, it is this anxiety of the freaky, the mad, and the queer revealing itself on the surface of the supposedly “normal” body/mind that structures the scientific methodologies and visual epistemologies of nineteenth century thought, most notably in the development of physiognomy and phrenology as methods of reading the face and body for signs of madness and racial aberration.

<sup>3</sup> My use of the term “body/mind” here and throughout this thesis is informed by Eli Clare, who in his book *Brilliant Imperfection*, writes: “I followed the lead of many communities and spiritual traditions that recognize body and mind not as two entities but as one, resisting the dualism built into white Western culture... I settled on *body-mind* in order to recognize both the inextricable relationships between our bodies and our minds and the ways in which the ideology of cure operates as if the two are distinct— the mind superior to the body, the mind defining personhood, the mind separating humans from nonhumans” (xvi). My use of body/mind is doubly useful in this project because, as I will show in Chapter One, the Victorians viewed the body and mind as connected entities that could produce aberrations through each other: the prime example of this is how Victorians believed madness could become visible on the bodily surface. Additionally, the term body/mind is useful towards one of the goals of this project in closing the gap between how we view physical difference and mental difference as separate from each other; for, in fact, as this research shows, madness and disability have always been inextricably linked.

its intimate contact with “Othered” bodies, as a result of the above-mentioned anxieties that the freak show stoked, and the subsequent need to produce “normal” and “abnormal” embodiment as visibly differentiated, the contours of the Victorian body/mind wavers at its edges, threatening to materialize as a ghostly abnormality.<sup>4</sup> The impossibility of materializing as a fully “normal” body that can be perceived as such brings into view the specters of social violences that create the injunction to delineate bodies as either “normal” or “abnormal,” “white and able-bodied” or “freak,” “sane” or “mad,” and that attempt to naturalize such divisions by erasing and relegating the material traces of that violence to the imaginative realm of the immaterial, as apparition that disappears once the freak steps off the stage.

In proposing this theory, I engage with a genealogy of queer theory that has thought through the historical, social production of material bodies. Most notably, I am extending here Michel Foucault’s theory of biopolitics and its emergence throughout the nineteenth century. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously identifies the nineteenth century as the era in which power no longer explicitly functions to “take life or let live,” and instead begins to “foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (38). In other words, power becomes most concerned with enacting its control over a population through the regulation and maintenance of its life, sanctioning and producing certain ways of being and erasing others. The material body, of course, becomes the focal point for enacting this power, as Foucault writes, biopower “[gave] rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examinations, to an entire micro-power concerned with

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<sup>4</sup> In “Intolerable Ambiguities,” Elizabeth Grosz argues that the nineteenth century freak show put pressure on the boundaries of bodily integrity, writing that “Freaks are those human beings who exist outside and in defiance of the structure of binary oppositions that govern our basic concepts and modes of self-definition. They occupy the impossible middle ground... They imperil the very definitions we rely on to classify humans, identities, and sexes—our most fundamental categories of self-definition and boundaries dividing self from otherness” (57).

the body” (145-146). These surveillances and orderings of space attempted to materialize bodies as “normal” while absencing “abnormal” bodies as immaterial at the same time that power-knowledge proliferated the ways a body could become “abnormal.” Importantly, this specific formulation of biopower is integral to the historical context of the nineteenth century, as Ellen Samuels writes that, “In the mid-nineteenth century a crisis began to emerge within modern nations regarding the identifiability and governability of the individual bodies making up their bodies politic,” and as a result of this crisis, biopower sought to “definitively identify bodies, to place them in categories delineated by race, gender, or ability status, and then to validate that placement through a verifiable, biological mark of identity” (1-2). We might say then that the biopolitical shift of power across the nineteenth century reveals a burgeoning crisis regarding the ability of bourgeois governance to maintain a stable normative order that abjects the “Other,” a crisis that inevitably leads to what I am calling queer materiality. In this thesis, it will become clear that the tensions and contradictions inherent in biopower— particularly that of ghosting abnormalities whilst simultaneously proliferating them— open the door for a queer materiality in which the veneer of a stable normative world is ripped away by the haunting and maddening possibility that any one body/mind could be perceived as aberrant in the right light. Indeed, the very matter of the body is constantly liable to becoming aberrational under the surveilling gaze of biopower.

On the note of bodily matter, queer materiality is also an extension of Judith Butler’s theorizations in *Bodies That Matter*. Butler writes that we must “return to the notion of matter, not as a site or a surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*. That matter is always materialized has, I think, to be thought in relation to the productive and, indeed, materializing effects of regulatory

power in the Foucauldian sense” (10). Butler’s formulation provides here a useful framework for understanding queer materiality— if matter is a “process of materialization that stabilizes over time,” then queer materiality might signify the instability of that ongoing process. Or, if bodies are materially produced through the regulatory effects of biopower, then queer materiality emerges in the slippages of that regulation— those slippery moments when the “freak show” inadvertently reveals the freakery of the spectator and the humanity of the spectacle, or the moment when madness materializes on the surface of the otherwise “normative” body.

Importantly, this idea of queer materiality emerges through the play of perception: how the world and how bodies take shape through perceptual gaps, distortions, and illusions. Gayle Salamon, for example, pushing forward Butler’s vision of bodily materiality in *Assuming a Body*, theorizes a gap between the “felt sense” of the body and the body-as-perceived, writing that “the body one feels oneself to have is not necessarily the same body that is delimited by its exterior contours.” Salamon further elaborates, “the body of which one supposedly has a ‘felt sense’ is not necessarily contiguous with the physical body as it is perceived from the outside, thus complicating the notion of the subject’s relationship to the materiality of her own body” (2-3). In other words, for Salamon, “bodies become material only through relations with others” (5). This gap between what one feels one’s body to be and the external perception of that body is integral to queer materiality, as it opens up a space where the materiality of the body always undergoing (re)construction *through* the power relations at play in the social world. Perception of the body as “normal” or “abnormal” might conflict with a subject’s own sense of their body as one, both, or neither; and it is through such conflict that queer materiality emerges as a process of reshaping the unstable matter of the body— a space where the queer, the freaky, and the mad might materialize on the body/mind’s surface.



In using the term “queer,” I draw upon the very real presence that those who exceeded the bounds of gender and sexual norms had in the freak show,<sup>5</sup> but I also use it to underscore how queer embodiment destabilizes normative bodily materiality. Salamon’s formulation of bodies materializing only through contact with other bodies can help us extend this notion that materiality is “queer.” In particular, it is useful to keep in mind Elizabeth Freeman’s warning that “‘queer’ cannot signal a purely deconstructive move or position of pure negativity. In enjoining queers to operate as agents of dis- or de-figuration, critics... risk evacuating the messiest thing about being queer: the actual meeting of bodies with other bodies and with objects” (xxi). In other words, there is risk in positioning “queer” as a pure binary opposition to the “normative,” for in doing so, “queer” exists merely as a negation; rather, what is “queer” should arise from the social ramifications of bodies coming into contact and conversation with one another. Taken together with Salamon’s theorization, we might posit that queer materiality is “queer” because bodily matter becomes animated, transferred, and transformed through contact (visual, tactile, or otherwise) with other bodies.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The consideration of the freak show as an already “queer” space is something that Eli Clare meditates on in his book *Exile and Pride*, writing that the proximity of “freaks” to “queers” is no accident, and that “Queer people deal with gawking all the time: when we hold hands in public, defy gender boundaries and norms, insist on recognition for our relationships and families. Intersex people, trans people, and people who don’t conform to gender norms—such as bearded women who grow their beards— have their own history at the freak show. Queer people have been told for centuries... that our bodies are abnormal” (112-113; emphasis added). So, then, queerness intersects with the history of freakery in that both are regarded as spectacles to gawk at precisely because of the abnormality of their bodily make-up, desire, and contact. And, as Clare emphasizes, “queerness” in the contemporary sense of gender and sexual deviation is inextricable from the historical reality of the freak show; in fact the history of the freak show haunts the embodied experience of being queer in the present-day.

<sup>6</sup> As David Gerber notes in his contribution to *Freakery*, the white able-bodied spectator saw in the freaks “mirror images” of what they feared they would become, revealing “deep-seated anxieties about violations to the integrity of [their] bodies” (44). The freak show thus operates on this bodily contact that threatens the bodily integrity of the normative, disembodied spectator. And, Gerber goes on to suggest an eroticism latent in the power dynamics accounting for the freak show’s popularity, as he writes that the freak show emerged from “a basic human desire... the will to dominate” and the ability to make “passive and submissive” (43). The freak show, already a queer space where the spectacle of bodily difference stretches the limits of material embodiment, is also a space infused with desire and the power dynamics of bodily contact.

The first half of this thesis is concerned with fleshing out this notion of queer materiality through cultural research on the freak show to show how the exhibition of nonwhite, disabled, queer, and mad bodies haunts normative embodiment and destabilizes knowable material reality. Afterwards, the second half of this thesis pivots into a consideration of the significance of queer materiality to queer, mad Victorian subjects— how queer materiality creates the possibility for queer, mad resistance. If the concept of queer materiality reveals the futility of separating the “normative” from the “abnormal,” and if it underscores the fundamental impossibility of an unchanging and knowable material world, then queer materiality, as I go on to show and argue, opens up the possibility for spaces of queer, mad existence and resistance to the restrictive orderings of the normative social world. To be queer and mad in a straight, rationalist world is to haunt and destabilize the social order through the exertion of one’s own presence— one’s own thoughts, desires, feelings— within the material realm. Indeed, to be mad is to perceive and communicate with the ghosts of the past and present that the violence of the normative order has attempted to erase and relegate to the immaterial. To be mad and queer is to see through the veneer of the (un)stable “normative” material world, and in doing so, the queer, mad Victorian subject is able to (re)construct a private world, a queer materiality, that gives breath and air to their own present existence, to those who came before them, and to those who will come after them.

My idea regarding queer materiality’s production of spaces for queer, mad resistance is heavily indebted to the work of Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology*. In her work, Ahmed is concerned with thinking about “how bodies become orientated by how they take up time and space” (5). Ahmed carefully considers how some bodies are more oriented with their surroundings than are others, how some people “fit” within the environments and material

realities constructed by the social order, and how others will fall out of line with their environments and feel out of place. For Ahmed, “if orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails” (11). Or in other words, to feel out of place or misaligned with one’s social environments and material worlds is to feel disoriented; and for Ahmed, it is this moment of disorientation, of seeing the world at a slant, of realizing one doesn’t align with the normative material world, that becomes rife with the possibility of asserting queer existence and remaking worlds: “If the object slips away, if its face becomes inverted, if it looks odd, strange, or out of place, what will we do? If we feel oblique, where will we find support? A queer phenomenology would involve an orientation toward queer, a way of inhabiting the world by giving ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (179). Thus, the moment of disorientation with the normative order produces this possibility of inhabiting a world where queer lives are supported and queer connections are made.

Whereas Ahmed is thinking about “disorientation” exclusively in terms of her conception of a queer phenomenology, this thesis and its concerns with madness and psychological/mental differences is attempting to connect queer studies and mad studies through the embodied experience of disorientation.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in Chapter Two I offer the idea of madness as a queer (dis)orientation with the normative world. Madness as a different way of perceiving materiality, indeed of seeing ghosts, opens up the possibility for the (re)construction of queer worlds. And it

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<sup>7</sup> The inextricability of queerness from madness is already recognized in mad studies, as Brenda LeFrançois writes in *Searching for a Rose Garden*, “in mad community spaces the queerness of thoughts and behaviours— or the indiscipline that may characterize them— is known, honored, and lived” (v-vi). At the same time, this connection is less recognized in some queer spaces, as PhebeAnn Wolframe in *Literatures of Madness* writes that, “Even on the sexual margins, mental and physical ‘fitness’ are the norm, and there is little consideration of ‘unfitness’ as a way of being” (43). This thesis attempts to solidify this connection between madness and queerness through the embodied experience of disorientation and its social and political ramifications.

is also important to emphasize here that disorientation and hallucination is a real embodied experience for a lot of people who identify as mad.<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, the figure of the ghost becomes a queer disturbance to the normative material world, a figure whose material existence the normative order attempts to erase, but whom the queer, mad subject is able to perceive through disorientation and connect with in order to (re)construct a genealogy of queer existence and belonging across the restrictions of linear time and space. As Ahmed reminds us, “We look back... as a refusal to inherit, as a refusal that is a condition for the arrival of queer. To inherit the past in this world for queers would be to inherit one’s own disappearance... The task is to trace the lines for a different genealogy, one that would embrace the failure of the family line as the condition of possibility for another way of dwelling in the world” (178). This is the significance of queer materiality to the mad, queer Victorian subject— it resists the disappearance of the queer into the realm of the immaterial and destabilizes normative materiality so that new (queer) possibilities of dwelling in the world may arise.

This thesis focuses on constructing and exhibiting the theory of queer materiality through the works of Charlotte Brontë, though I do not view the theory and its applicability as limited to Brontë’s oeuvre; and in fact, in the conclusion I offer a reading of Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone* as a way to show the wider applicability and usefulness of this theory to Victorian literary studies. That being said, it is very significant that the ideas of this thesis arise from

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<sup>8</sup> I offer this passage from Elyn Saks’ famous memoir *The Center Cannot Hold* as an illustration of this: “And then something odd happens. My awareness (of myself, of him, of the room, of the physical reality around and beyond us) instantly grows fuzzy. Or wobbly. I think I am dissolving. I feel— my mind feels— like a sand castle with all the sand sliding away in the receding surf... Consciousness gradually loses its coherence. One’s center gives way. The center cannot hold. The ‘me’ becomes a haze... There is no longer a sturdy vantage point from which to look out, take things in, assess what’s happening... Random moments of time follow one another. Sights, sounds, thoughts, and feelings don’t go together. No organizing principle takes successive moments in time and puts them together in a coherent way from which sense can be made” (10-11). In this project, I ask what it might look like if the destabilization of the material world through disorientation gave way to a reconstruction of a new, queerer world— I ask what it might be like to make mad sense.

working closely with Brontë's texts over the past few years. There has always been something eminently strange— indeed, queer— about Brontë's novels for me. Part of this feeling might arise from Brontë's formal innovation in developing the mode of Gothic realism in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*; and in fact, it might be said that the imposition of Gothic elements onto the Victorian realist novel is its own form of queer materiality— for the form itself suggests that the veneer of the material world is not all it seems, and that something freaky, spooky, and queer lies beneath.

But also, it is important that these ideas originate with Brontë because of how I have been haunted, and indeed literary studies itself has been haunted, by some of the stranger, ghostlier figures of her texts: particularly Bertha Mason, Lucy Snowe, and the ghost nun of *Villette*. The fame of *Jane Eyre* and the controversial character of Bertha Mason has led to Bertha becoming the proverbial “madwoman in the attic”— a character whose notorious reputation precedes her. It is precisely the fact that Bertha Mason seems to haunt the text of *Jane Eyre* itself and the discussions surrounding the novel that she becomes a central focus of this thesis; and in particular, in Chapter One, I engage with scholarship on Bertha that attempts to pin down Bertha's racial identity and madness on the material reality of her body. I refute this pinning down and instead offer the idea that Bertha is an intentionally ambiguous figure whose freakish, ghostly presence in Thornfield Hall destabilizes the normative ordering of the bourgeois home, and whose (queer) materiality conjures up the fears of the possibilities of embodiment— the possibility that one might materialize as racialized, queer, and mad. In doing this work I am indebted to queer of color critiques and particularly the work of Roderick Ferguson in *Aberrations in Black* and Siobhan Somerville's *Queering The Color Line*, as the former has helped to conceptualize how queer, black, and indigenous presence haunts the white

heteronormative order through material proximity in time and space, and the latter has helped me conceptualize historically how Bertha's madness materializes on her body/mind as a result of the simultaneous racialization and sexualization of her body.

With regard to *Villette*, part of the impetus for Chapter Two arose from the utter strangeness of the novel and its seeming out-of-placeness in the Victorian canon, but *Villette* is particularly useful for this project because of its famed narrator, Lucy Snowe, whose loneliness and mental pain throughout the novel informs her sharp and oblique perceptions of the world around her. The way Lucy narrates the novel is elusive and, in fact, disorienting, and it is this elusive narration coupled with her mad perceptions that becomes fruitful for understanding how the queer, mad subject makes room for their own existence in a world that attempts to make them disappear. Lucy both sees ghosts and is ghostly throughout the text— she is constantly trying to find her place in a social order where there is no place for her to be, and in the midst of her queer loneliness, she finds connection and communion with another queer figure— the ghost nun. As I will show in Chapter Two, Lucy struggles to find her place in the normative material world, and when she becomes aware of the very real pain she feels in being unable to become oriented within this world, she becomes mad, and in this moment of madness, of disorientation with the orderings of the normative world, she chooses to construct her own private world where queer existence can persist across the strictures of linear time and space— a world of queer materiality.

In this thesis, I hope not only to have created a theoretical concept that pushes forward inquiry into queer existence and resistance in the Victorian era, but also to have provided research that bridges some divides in the area of social justice scholarship. In showing how, historically, “freaks” have been treated as “mad,” and the “mad” treated as “freaks,” I hope to have shown that disability studies and mad studies share the same concerns and historical roots

with regard to the oppression of non-normative body/minds.<sup>9</sup> I hope to have shown that racialization and white supremacy have always been inextricable from the construction of non-normative embodiment as “queer.” I hope to have shown that the personal and the embodied is inextricable from the intellectual and from critical inquiry. And I hope to have shown that queer, disabled, mad, and non-white subjectivities all share the common and intertwined experience of being abjected from the normative world as haunting threats to the stability of the social order. Well, I say— let us come together, and haunt the social order into materializing as a queer world.

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<sup>9</sup> The splintering of mad studies from disability studies can be a contentious one. In “Coming Out Mad, Coming Out Disabled,” Elizabeth Brewer writes that, “The scholarship on tensions between mad studies and disability studies notably lacks voices that speak from both positions. This perspective is necessary, particularly because publications within disability studies increasingly include madness, yet few writers candidly navigate the historically uneasy mad/disability relationship” (19-20). This thesis and its research aspire to address precisely this tension that Brewer highlights through nineteenth century historical contexts that link disability with madness.

## CHAPTER ONE: BERTHA MASON AND THE HAUNTING SPECTACLE OF THE MAD FREAK

*Introduction*

“What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face,” so narrates Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë’s famous novel of the same name, after being “invited” by Mr. Rochester to “come up to the house and visit Mrs. Poole’s patient, and *my wife*,” the famed “madwoman of the attic,” Bertha Mason (337-338). There is no scarcity of literary criticism surrounding the figure of Bertha Mason and her depiction as a “maddened beast,” but recent inroads made by disability scholars’ inquiry into Victorian culture and literature has suggested the need for further, more complex attention to Bertha Mason’s embodied experience of madness, and how that experience shapes, and is shaped by, nineteenth century discourse around bodies.

In particular, recent critique has challenged second-wave feminist readings of Bertha, suggesting, as Elizabeth Donaldson does in her contribution to *The Madwoman and the Blindman*, that early critique of Bertha examines “madness as a metaphor, not mental illness in the clinical sense,” and that in doing so, it not only ignores the real, non-metaphorical impact that Bertha Mason’s depiction had in directly shaping psychiatric discourse and public views of “madwomen” at the time of *Jane Eyre*’s publication,<sup>10</sup> but also that such critique ignores “the material condition of the body” (14-15). Donaldson thus suggests pushing readings of Bertha to

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<sup>10</sup> Donaldson refers to Elaine Showalter’s scholarship, who wrote that “Bertha’s violence, dangerousness and rage, her regression to an inhuman condition and her sequestration became such a powerful model for Victorian readers, including psychiatrists, that it influenced even medical accounts of female insanity” (14)



treat “mental illness as physical impairments,” and to stress the historical “connections between madness and physiognomy, between the mind and body” (15-16). The authors throughout *The Madwomen and the Blindman* do just that, as D. Christopher Gabbard suggests reading Bertha in the context of her inception in the 1840s “when public policy reforms were being instituted for improving the treatment of mentally ill and disabled people,” arguing that “Brontë’s novel can be understood as incorporating these reforms and reflecting negatively on Rochester’s custodial care practices” as his negligent care of the mentally ill Bertha leads to her eventual suicide (92). Susannah B Mintz in turn argues that Jane’s interactions with Bertha leads to a “recognition” of bodily difference that “acknowledges and accepts the frailties of the body” (130).

But while this turn to a feminist/disability reading of Bertha Mason is both a welcome and necessary development, I find this newer critique to be limited in a few important ways: first, treating madness as an impairment of the material body ignores that, in a century defined by visual epistemologies and the scientific classifications of the observable world, mental illness was not as easily visible upon the material body as Donaldson suggests. In fact, Donaldson’s identification of physiognomy and phrenology as systems of nineteenth century scientific thought that emphasized the relationship between mind and body, ironically, undermine her own argument. Donaldson is right to argue that “the system of phrenology and physiognomy in which Jane Eyre participates is part of the corporealization of mad bodies in the nineteenth century” (27); but, far from solidifying mental illness as easily visible on the body through readings of facial features and cranial shapes, physiognomy and phrenology were practices challenged even at the time, and were produced as a part of a wider scientific and cultural anxiety to unearth bodily and mental differences from the invisible depths of the body/mind to its visible surface (Wallis 41, 143). Ultimately, physiognomy and phrenology acted as methods for producing

madness on the material body/mind: by placing Victorian body/minds under the observational eye of the medical man, madness became a story of the Self that the body/mind could reveal through a wrinkle in the skin, a bump on the skull, or an errant gesture. The observation of the body changed the shape that madness took in Victorian thought, and so too did madness reshape the material body.

In other words, Donaldson takes for granted the materiality of madness on the Victorian body/mind, when in fact, the visible boundaries of which body/minds were “normative” was more in flux than ever before. It is true that phrenology and physiognomy act as evidence of the material embodiment of madness in the nineteenth century— but it is a queer materiality. By this, I mean that madness in the nineteenth century was less a verifiable fact of the material body and more a queer “abnormality” that could materialize on the surface of the body/mind under interrogation— a not-quite-material spectral trace of something “freakish” about the body/mind captured in a fleeting glance. And importantly, the perception of certain body/minds as mad or as being liable to madness was inextricable with prevailing notions of race. As Anne Harrington notes, physiognomy’s popularity suggested “the idea that signs of certain kinds of degeneracy might be etched into people’s faces,” and it was believed that “the brains of such people... often showed structural anomalies otherwise seen only in apes and ‘savages’” (8). In other words, madness only became visible to the normative Victorian when it was produced through readings of the body that were inextricable from racialization.

In this way, the medical practices and discourses on madness in the nineteenth century share a lot in common with another cultural phenomenon of the period: the freak show. Both attempted to pin abstract concepts of queer abnormalities onto the material body/mind as unassailable facts, and in conjunction, the matter of black and indigenous bodies became itself

“mad” and threatened to materialize a racialized madness on the surface of the normative white Victorian body. As I will show, the emergence of the freak show in the nineteenth century provoked Victorian anxieties around bodily difference and destabilized beliefs in “normative” bodily integrity, pushing the limits of how Victorians conceptualized the ways bodies were shaped and materialized; and, as I will also show, the spectacle of the “freakish body” is intimately tied to scientific inquiry into bodily and mental difference, including psychiatric inquiry into madness which anxiously attempted to make visible and material the specter of madness that haunted the Victorian body/mind.

Importantly, when it comes to the way that madness materialized on the Victorian body/mind, such a formulation is inextricable from the intersections of race and how “mad” and “freakish” bodies were always already racialized. It is thus imperative that new inquiry into Bertha Mason centralizes not only her madness and disabilities, but also her racialization and the consequences of this entanglement of race, disability, and madness. For, if indeed we are to examine the material conditions of Bertha’s embodiment of madness, race becomes inextricable from the construction of that materiality. In approaching Bertha’s racialization as a key part of how her body/mind materializes as “mad,” we can point to the nineteenth century freak show as a central historical context out of which Bertha emerges: for Bertha’s racialization is famously complicated and ambiguous, and it was the freak show that made race a complicated and ambiguous issue to Victorian audiences. Indeed, Bertha’s racial “Otherness” exists as a ghostly possibility that could materialize in a multitude of ways on her body/mind: in the famous scene quoted here at the beginning, Bertha’s embodiment is thoroughly ambiguous— “whether beast or human being, one could not... tell.”— and so her body eludes neat classification, materializing first as beast, then as human being, and finally, something in-between that cannot

be told. As I will show, it is the haunting threat of becoming the “Othered” freak that actually drives the impulse to pin down the boundaries of racial, mental, and bodily difference on the visible surface of the body/mind.

We might then consider that Brontë’s depiction of Bertha as “racially ambiguous” is not only intentional, it is colored by the shifting conceptions of bodily matter provoked by the nineteenth century freak show; and as I go on to argue in this chapter, reading Bertha in the context of the freak show might help us to consider the central role that indigeneity plays in the construction of Bertha’s racial identity and the materialization of her body/mind as mad. Indeed, “racial freaks” were their own category of freakery at the freak show (Bogdan 28-29), and as I will show, such exhibits intentionally blurred the lines between white, black, and indigenous. Freak show exhibitions were full of black and indigenous peoples displaced to Britain from the edges of the empire, and they intentionally capitalized upon shifting social understandings of racial embodiment and cultural anxieties regarding the purity of the white body provoked by the expansion of colonialism. Reading Bertha Mason through the freak show and emerging scientific thought at mid-century, I hope to show that Bertha, far from representing a stable visual materiality of the racialized mad body, is instead indicative of the unstable materiality of bodily and mental difference in the nineteenth century, one that spectators feared could cause their own normative body/minds to materialize as a queer and “savage” “Otherness.”

While the freak show made a spectacle of disabled and racialized bodies, emphasizing in dramatic fashion the seemingly infinite ways a body could be shaped into a material “Otherness,” madness eluded scientists’ attempts to place it visually upon the surface of the material body. These phenomena in conjunction with each other highlight how the nineteenth century body/mind was spectral in its construction—racialized, queer, disabled, and mad freaks

were ghostly in the way they stretched Victorian imaginations of what a body could *be*. Indeed, images of freaks, maddened and disabled bodies, indigenous and black bodies, haunted “normative” understandings of the material body— the bearded lady instilled fears in white Victorian women that body hair could masculinize and racialize them by uncannily emerging to the surface of the body (Stern 216), “racial freaks” imperiled the ability of the white body to keep itself free from the “stain” of racial difference (Stern 208), and the futile investigation into the bodily roots of madness made it appear as though insanity could be latent within the normatively “sane” body/mind, ready to reveal itself on the bodily surface at any moment (Oppenheim 6). This ghostly effect of bodily and mental difference that blurs lines of normative/abnormal and Self/Other, the way these differences materialized on the bodily surface through public spectacle and scientific categorization, and the shifting Victorian imagination of the limits of bodily shape and form, is what I call a queer materiality of the Victorian body/mind.

In this chapter, queer materiality is meant to denote several things: first, it points to how the freak show undermined the integrity of the normative body/mind through coming into material contact with “freaks,” expanding and proliferating both the ways that bodies could materialize in abnormal forms and the ways that abnormalities could materialize on the body; and secondly, it suggests that the malleability of the Victorian body/mind leads to the material body being a rather queer thing. Indeed, the very matter of the Victorian body/mind is haunted by the ghostly possibility that there is no “normal” and sanctified way to exist within the body in a world full of mad freaks. Ultimately, in this chapter, it is my goal make explicit the queer materiality of the Victorian body/mind, and to show how reading Bertha Mason through the lens of a historicized queer materiality can open up new, complex ways of engaging the racialized (dis)embodiment of madness in the nineteenth century. As I will show, queerness, madness,

disability, and race are thoroughly intertwined with one another, and the idea that any and all of these markers of “abnormalities” could materialize on the body of the “normative” Victorian subject at any given time was a very real, and haunting, fear.

### *Freaks, Ghosts, and Madness*

Queer materiality is ghostly in that it considers the role of invisible matter in producing the visible, for it recalls the memory of observed abnormality as a haunting force on the normative body/mind— the ghostly threat of becoming the freak, of becoming “Other.” In the words of Julian Wolfreys, spectrality reveals that “the invisible is not simply the dialectical opposite of the visible but is part of the visible, as what makes the visible possible” (85). In the terms of this study then, the invisible abnormalities that haunt the edges of the normative Victorian body/mind are what produce the body as visibly normal/abnormal. Or, as Wolfreys explains, the ghost and the ghostly reveal the way that “perception... [is] caught up in, traced by phantom effects, even as [it] haunt[s] the material... if not the very idea of history itself” (22). Queer materiality is not only about how the body/mind materializes in relationship to ab/normality, it is also about how all normative or normative-adjacent bodies can be perceived in the right light as abnormal, a gap that carries the weight of history behind it as a haunting phantom that demands our attention precisely because it is that history that renders body/minds visible, and others invisible, in particular ways.

Indeed, it is because of the Victorian impulse to render all things visible and knowable, to banish all shadows of doubt from the corners of the mind, that the invisible queer material of the body haunts as ghostly possibility.<sup>11</sup> As Nicola Bown and others note in *The Victorian*

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<sup>11</sup> In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon writes: “Hypervisibility is a kind of obscenity of accuracy... No shadows, no ghosts. In a culture seemingly ruled by technologies of hypervisibility, we are led to believe... that everything can

*Supernatural*, for the Victorians, “the invisible was the subject of intense investigation and speculation because of its very invisibility” (12). If bodily and mental difference couldn’t be made visible on the body/mind, then the Victorian impulse was to search for the phantom traces of abnormality. In other words, what is queer about queer materiality is this perpetual in-betweenness: that no one is viewed as statically “normal,” and that under observation, one’s body/mind may very well materialize as mad, freakish, queer. What could be seen would be analyzed and categorized, and what couldn’t be seen would haunt until its very absence could be perceived, felt, and seen as a materializing substance. This is the ghostly manifestation of queer materiality. In fact, we might say that ghosts are symbolically the agents of queer materiality: if queer materiality occurs in the moments where things seem *strange* or *freaky*, the moments of paranoia and anxiety where one feels that there is something “wrong” with their body/mind (as in, no longer lining up with the normative order of things— no longer “belonging” to the established codes of sociality and bodily presentation), then the ghost is the harbinger of the queer lives that the normative order attempts to reduce alternately to spectacle and invisibility. To see the ghost is to consider that the world might be a rather queer place haunted by its own violences committed in the name of maintaining order, and that there is no stable and knowable “normality” to retreat to when faced with the queer.

The ghostly is an important facet of queer materiality to consider in this study because, in re-approaching Bertha Mason in the context of the freak show and medical discourses, we have not only to contend with how the history of the freak show plays a key role in producing her depiction as a racialized “beast,” but also with how Bertha is at first imagined as a ghost that haunts Thornfield Hall, and how Jane’s contact with Bertha-as-ghost threatens to reveal Jane as

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be seen... that neither repression nor the return of the repressed, in the form of either improperly buried bodies or countervailing systems of value or difference, occurs with any meaningful result” (16).

having “an over-stimulated brain” with “nerves” that are “in fault” (327). In other words, bodily contact with the mad freak has the potential to materialize Jane’s own body/mind as mad, as the encounter with Bertha’s mad “freakish” body threatens to reveal Jane’s own potential body/mind non-normativity, materializing madness on the surface of Jane’s white normative body. We might say then, that queer materiality as a form of contact between “normal” and “abnormal” subjects produces an effect wherein the “normal” subject displaces anxieties of bodily incoherence onto the “abnormal” subject in the form of seeing ghosts. In other words, rather than confront the frightening realities of bodily difference, the “normative” subject might perceive the real presence of the freak as ghostly, a disappeared abnormality, as of a different reality, belonging not securely to this world, confounding the “known” order of bodies and things.

Queer materiality then is what occurs when the stability of knowable reality is threatened, not necessarily by that which is unknown or unknowable, but rather, by that which we attempt to relegate to the nonexistence of immateriality or imperceptibility. This is why the ghost becomes the indicator that something queer is afoot within material reality— Avery Gordon writes that “The ghost... is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there... makes itself known or apparent to us,” and that “[b]eing haunted draws us affectively... not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (8). Being haunted by queer possibility, by the idea that the material world might be queerer than the technologies of enforced normality can efface, arrives not as a new stability, not as a new rationalist “known” order of things, but rather as a feeling that the world and/or the body/mind is undergoing transformation— a materialization of the queer on the perceivable surface. In queer materiality, ghosts appear, or become perceivable, through the perceptual distortions of bodies, objects, and realities sparked by the futile desire to shore up the boundaries of the “normative,” wherein the “normative” is



always a negotiation between the visible body/mind and the invisible material forces of history, memory, and perception.

Indeed, the boundaries of the “normative” were reaching a point of crisis at the time of *Jane Eyre*’s publication in 1847, due in no small part to the freak show. As Nadja Durbach notes in *Spectacles of Deformity*, “the word ‘normal,’ denoting conforming to the common type, didn’t emerge in the English language until around 1840; its derivatives ‘norm,’ ‘normality,’ and ‘normalcy’ followed shortly afterward” (21). Similarly, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in the introduction to *Freakery* writes that “Not until 1847 does the word [*freak*] become synonymous with human corporeal anomaly” (4). Thus, at the same time that ideas of “normality” are solidifying in the cultural consciousness, the “freak” begins to challenge normative notions of human corporeality.

The queer materiality of the Victorian body/mind, then, arises from the need to rapidly delineate “normative” corporeality from the non-normative, and unsurprisingly, it is at this same time that “teratology” emerges as a scientific discipline. Teratology, “the study, classification, and manipulation of monstrous bodies,” attempts to cope with the queer materiality of the Victorian body/mind through casting “freak” bodies as “monstrous” and in need of close scrutiny and observation (Garland-Thomson 2). While the spectator of the freak show enjoys “the privileged state of disembodiment” conferred upon them, the spectacle is contained as monster, and as Garland-Thomson states, “human monsters confirmed, repudiated, or revised what humanity imagined as the order of things. By challenging the boundaries of the human and the coherence of what seemed to be the natural world, monstrous bodies appeared as sublime, merging the terrible with the wonderful, equalizing repulsion with attraction” (3, 10). In stretching “the order of things” into the imaginative realm of dangerous desire, indicated by the

simultaneous repulsion and attraction of the “freak,” the matter of the Victorian body/mind, of both disembodied normative spectator and hyper-embodied abnormal spectacle, appears haunted by queer animation.

Of course, the haunting animation of the spectacle was a staple of Victorian culture and media, not only in the freak show, but also in stage magic, dime museums, and even the séance. Indeed, as Simone Natale argues in *Supernatural Entertainments*, “belief in ghosts contributed to the rise of the entertainment industry as we know it” (2). Intriguingly, the first time “spirit communication” is performed “before a paying public” is 1849, which is cotemporaneous with the reification of bodily norms and with the emergence of “freakery” as corporeal abnormality (1). This is significant because it suggests that the freak show, interest in viewing ghostly materializations, and the shifting boundaries of embodiment are all fundamentally intertwined with each other with regard to their emergence at mid-century. As Natale states, in the séance “as in freak shows and other spectacular exhibits, the subject of attention was a ‘living curiosity,’ a phenomenon that escaped normality to enter the dimension of curiosity and wonder” (4). And, in fact, photographs of ghosts and demonstrations of mesmerism<sup>12</sup> were a part of P.T. Barnum’s 1941 American Museum alongside the freak shows (Natale 68). Indeed, the connections between ghosts and freakery are very literal— in Victorian culture, ghosts and freaks were at the center of popular media, and not coincidentally, both offered to the normative disembodied spectator examples of how bodies manifest as (in)corporeal, how bodily matter is itself an unstable thing that can shift and transform, how abnormality can stretch and distort the material body, and how the matter of the flesh and the spirit is undeniably queer “stuff.”

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<sup>12</sup> This is significant because mesmerism was connected to spirits and spiritualism, as Vanessa Dickerson writes in *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide*, “Mesmerism would in turn pave the way for the midcentury advent of spiritualism, as the same fluid that enabled one body to communicate energy and currents to another body also facilitated human communication with dead spirits” (17)

As Barnum's display style demonstrates, ghosts and freak shows went hand-in-hand precisely because they both undermined scientific authority and expert opinions of the knowable world. As Natale notes, Barnum's American Museum "encourage[ed] its patrons to be skeptical of institutional authority. It was a place, by Barnum's own design, where laypeople could take on the experts and win" (68). Both spirit manifestations and the freak show had the effect of undermining the knowability of the material world, and as a result, both worked simultaneously in alliance with scientific investigations into the knowable world *and* against the power of the scientific establishment. In the case of the freak show, the "knowable" was confounded by the use of illusion and deception to produce the freaks. Robert Bogdan writes in *Freakery* that "every person exhibited was misrepresented. Showmen fabricated freaks' backgrounds, the nature of their condition... and other personal characteristics." In other words, "misrepresentation was an accepted practice" (25). This was especially true in regards to race, as Durbach also notes that:

Showmen in the United States often employed locals to perform the role of savages, wild men, or cannibals because phony natives were easier to hire, cheaper to employ, and more cooperative than the authentic variety. By the end of the nineteenth century, 'painted Irishmen or indigenous British blacks were now displacing true Africans in British show business' as well. Indeed, there were so many fake Africans on the fairgrounds circuit that by the turn of the century the term 'Zulu' had become 'synonymous with artifice and disguise' (150).

But, despite the use of deception and fakery to stage the freak, "freak shows were often presented as educational or scientific exhibits" (Bogdan 25). In fact, the connection to scientific knowledge was thoroughly embedded in the freak show; as Bogdan further states, "Some

exhibits were presented to scientific societies for discussion and speculation. Showmen played up the science affiliation. They used the word ‘museum’ in the title of many freak shows and referred to freak show lecturers as ‘professor’ or ‘doctor.’” (29). And Eli Clare writes that, “Often handbills included the testimony of a doctor who verified the ‘authenticity’ of the ‘freak’ and sometimes explained the causes of his or her ‘freakishness.’ Tellingly doctors performed this role, rather than anthropologists, priests, or philosophers” (97-98). In Durbach’s words, “Freak shows were... part of a much larger scientific discourse of the corporeal norm that arose around the middle of the nineteenth century” (23). It is no wonder then that, as Clare notes, “The decline of the freak show in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century coincided with the medicalization of disability... Explicit voyeurism stopped being socially acceptable except when controlled by the medical establishment,” (100). Illusion, deception, artifice, and fakery were central elements of the freak show; and yet, despite this, the scientific establishment not only validated the false claims of the freak show, it found value in making “freaks” objects for scientific observation.

Again, the parallels to a heightened Victorian interest in Spiritualism and belief in ghosts is significant here, as it shows that the freak show and Spiritualism were concurrent historical formations that informed one another through the use of illusion to produce “Other” bodies as entertaining spectacle. Like the freak show, spirit manifestations similarly engaged scientific curiosity at the same time that they undermined the validity of scientific knowledge. As Richard Noakes writes in “Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in mid-Victorian Britain,” at the same time that Spiritualism was a threat to the scientific establishment, it sparked scientific research into the séance, which was decried by the establishment as “giving respectability to a disreputable subject” (24, 35). At the same time, Spiritualists asserted the scientific nature of the séance and of ghost-seeing, as to them, spirit manifestations were viewed as deriving “from

natural causes, whether these were well-known mental mechanisms, new forces associated with the body, or intelligences from the spirit world” (23). The reasoning here was that there is no experience unalterable in an age stamped by the impress of progress: “There was no reason... why anybody ‘acquainted with the latest discoveries and the highest speculations of modern science’ should deny the ‘*possibility*’ of the existence of invisible intelligent beings capable of acting on matter” (29-30). In the words of John Rutherford in 1874, “Organized bodies... are forever giving off particles... It requires but a small stretch of the imagination to conceive that the particles thrown off by human feelings bear the impress of their hopes, fear, and expectations,” feelings which can then manifest materially as spirits (Bown et al. 6-7).

Natale also notes the scientific strain of Spiritualism, writing that spiritualists “explicitly refused the concept of the supernatural by arguing that spiritualism was based on the objective and scientific discovery that the living are able to communicate with the dead” (60). It should be no surprise that ghosts had this effect of both challenging scientific knowledge while also blurring the lines by staking their own claim in materiality, for as Gordon notes, “the unexpected arrival of ghosts... ruins our ability to distinguish reality and fiction, magic and science, savage and civilized, self and other, and in those ways gives to reality a different coloring” (53). Particularly in the nineteenth-century, “magic and science...were not contrasted but rather intimately allied” (Natale 4). Ghosts and the freak show were particularly troublesome to Victorians looking to make the demarcations Gordon lists above— at the same time that the freak show used deception to both artificially accentuate and materially close the gap between “savage, othered” freaks and the “civilized selfhood” of normative spectators, ghosts had one foot in scientific materialism and the other in the magical supernatural.

The challenges presented to the scientific establishment by freak shows and Spiritualism is essential to understand here because it is precisely this queer relationship to science that make freaks and ghosts agents of destabilizing matter and knowledge in Victorian England. And, when knowledge and the knowability of the material world are destabilized, what is opened up is the potential for madness. Freaks and ghosts undermined bodily coherency, giving rise to a queer materiality that haunted the boundaries of the Victorian body/mind, and it is this same queer materiality that produced the fervent Victorian anxiety to materialize madness on the body/mind's visible surface. In the nineteenth century, madness was especially feared for its invisibility and its inability to be easily categorized. As Foucault notes in *Madness & Civilization*, by the nineteenth century "the madman was... vulnerable to observation, but such observation did not, basically, involve him; it involved only his monstrous surface, his visible animality" and in the asylum, "observation... would spy out any incongruity, any disorder, any awkwardness might betray itself" (248-249). In other words, in a world where bodily and mental abnormality *must* be made visible, and thus knowable, even when invisible, where scientific knowledge is being contested by the interest in ghost-seeing and the production of "freaks" through illusion, "madness" as an invisible difference becomes a site of intense anxiety and policing for society at large and the scientific establishment in particular. Foucault's madman's "monstrous surface" already marks him as a "freakish" spectacle to be gawked at, but his elusive madness must be pinned down by constant observation of the body, an observation that could catch the phantom traces of madness as they arrived and disappeared. In Foucault's words, "Madness is responsible only for that part of itself which is visible. All the rest is reduced to silence. Madness no longer exists except *as seen*" (250). If the Victorians investigated the invisible precisely because of its invisibility, then the invisibility of madness meant the Victorian

body/mind had to be materialized as visibly mad through intense and microscopic observation in order to reify the separation between “Self” and “Other” that the emergence of “normality” demanded.

It is no coincidence that “the physician” who previously “played no part in the life of confinement” of the insane, “[n]ow... becomes the essential figure of the asylum” (Foucault 270). Queer materiality is produced through the scientific categorization of abnormalities and the intense scrutiny of the body’s matter, and at the same time, it is the impossibility of neatly categorizing and visualizing these abnormalities that render the invisible, the incorporeal, and the uncategorizable as haunting substances that science seeks to eradicate— to disappear. Like the freak show, the asylum provided its own opportunity for voyeurism upon the mad freak, as “Bedlam [asylum] had served since the seventeenth century as a venue for ‘spectacle, a place of entertainment,’ a practice that was ongoing at the time of *Jane Eyre*’s publication. Londoners went to Bedlam to gawk at the lunatics, paying a penny to peer into their cells” (Gabbard 98). Madness in the asylum is alternately propped up as a spectacle for the onlooking masses to visibly *see* what the mad body looked like, to draw the dividing line between “normative” and “abnormal,” and is then disappeared from the daily world, contained in a building where scientists and medical men search desperately for the visible markers of madness in order to eradicate it from society. Just as the image of the freak haunts the normative spectator once the freak steps off the stage and the artificial structural boundaries between “us” and “them” are erased, so too does madness haunt once it disappears behind asylum walls, for without the space of containment to reify these boundaries, madness threatens to materialize on the body/mind through disquieting gestures and strange behaviors— spectral traces of the madness and queerness that lurks beneath the surface. It is precisely the inability of madness to be fixed onto

the external body that presents a challenge to scientific knowledge and its reliance on visual epistemologies: how to preserve the “norm” of sanity in an age where bodily difference is both concretized and destabilized by *looking* at the freak?

The asylum provided a contained space where this question could be investigated and prodded by medical and scientific professionals. As Foucault writes, “The science of mental disease, as it would develop in the asylum, would always be only of the order of observation and classification” (250). In other words, in order for the norm to remain the disembodied white “sane” male, madness had to emerge to the surface of the body to be observed and scrutinized, and this is precisely what the Victorian asylum attempted to do. In her study *Investigating the Body in the Victorian Asylum*, Jennifer Wallis writes that “there was a sense among many... researchers that mental disease could be located, somewhere, deep within the bodily fabric” (1). Searching for madness within the bodily matter itself, asylum physicians and researchers attempted, in Wallis’ terms, to “surface” the madness of the body: “The multiple uses of the word ‘surface’ mean that it can denote several things: *giving* a surface to something, a thing *coming* to the surface, or an agent intervening to *bring* something to the surface,” and in the Victorian asylum “elements of the body are ‘surfaced’ so that ‘bodies take shape and take place through practices of all sorts’” (6). Janet Oppenheim puts this idea in different terms in *Shattered Nerves*, writing that during Victoria’s reign mental affliction “was believed to have somatic roots” (9). In other words, Victorian medical discourses of madness attempted to bring madness to the visible “surface” of the body and to give shape to the body’s “surface” by investigating what lay underneath, deep within the “somatic roots” of the body/mind. It is this aspect of medical discourses and its body-morphing power that recalls the staging of the freak show, for as Bogdan writes, a freak “is not a person but the enactment of a tradition, the performance of a



stylized presentation” (35). It is not the material body itself that produces the freak, but rather, the performative framing separating the spectators from the spectacle. The medical discourses surrounding madness in the nineteenth century performed a similar action: in order to “surface” to the body/mind, madness had to be made visibly markable and observable through classification of the body (for example, through the practices of phrenology and physiognomy) and its behaviors— in other words, madness had to be staged, stylized, presented, and performed.

The search for the “somatic roots” of madness was a direct result of Victorian anxiety regarding queer materiality and the crisis of normality that burgeoned at mid-century. In this way, the ambiguities of the “freak” body mirror the “surfacing” of the mad body— both attempt to assuage anxieties of non-normative embodiment through rationalizing that which was considered irrational. In the freak show, corporeal abnormality, or freakery, is materialized as abnormal through the framing of the public spectacle; and in the asylum, madness is surfaced as an abnormality of the corporeal body through intensive observation and surveillance. In both instances, the specter of the abnormal body/mind haunts the normative, threatening to materialize Victorian body/minds as queer, freaky, and mad.

### *Bertha Mason and the Racialized Mad Freak*

I am not the first to read Bertha Mason within the context of the freak show. In “Am I a Monster: Jane Eyre among the Shadow of Freaks,” Chih-Ping Chen argues that Bertha’s appearance in the attic of Thornfield Hall “recalls that of the Hottentot Venus,” and that “the suspense surrounding Bertha’s appearance echoes the provocation in advertisements” of Barnum’s “What Is It?” exhibits, which “established the attraction by emphasizing how the freak

body borders on the boundaries of human and animal.” Chen is particularly interested in how Rochester becomes a showman exhibiting his freak to an audience, as the scene in the attic “achieves much of its dramatic effect and intensity by evoking the entwined narrative forms that produce freak shows” (367). Chen is of course referring to the strategies of deception and fakery that Bogdan notes produced the “freak” as a constant misrepresentation and a stylized presentation. And indeed, the scene in the attic *should* be read as a misrepresentation— Bertha is made a dehumanized beast through the deceptive framing of the freak show, and in this section I will show how exactly Bertha is framed as a haunting “mad freak” by the novel.

Read in the context of Barnum’s “What Is It?” exhibit and similar exhibitions that racialized the “freak,” we can see that Bertha Mason’s madness, ghostliness, and racialization are all products of the queer materiality of the Victorian body/mind— the depiction of Bertha in the novel (the descriptions of her face and body, the way she is confined within the margins of the bourgeois home, how she becomes a spectacle erupting in the center of the narrative that disappears just as quickly as she arrives) is that of the mad freak whose body/mind threatens to destabilize and dematerialize (and in fact, incinerate) the normative order of things. Just as the freak show displayed its “freaks” for entertainment and profit, so too does Bertha’s appearance in the novel act as an entertaining spectacle meant to titillate Victorian readers, as she becomes the twist upon which the plot hinges. And importantly, while Rochester desperately attempts to hide Bertha, and to keep out of the public eye his proximity to the mad freak, once Bertha’s real and material presence can no longer be contained and erased, Rochester leads Jane and the witnesses of their interrupted wedding up to the attic of Thornfield Hall to put Bertha’s body/mind on display— as Gabbard notes, “Rochester’s transformation into both showman and ‘Interpreter’ calls attention to his exclusive role in telling Bertha’s story and especially to the

discursive template he uses to guide the gentlemen and Jane through a reading of her body” (97). Bertha in this moment becomes a freak show with Rochester as the showman who provides the only backstory and narrative we get for interpreting Bertha’s body/mind and behavior. But this will come to haunt Rochester as well, as towards the novel’s conclusion, we find out that Bertha has set a fire that destroyed Thornfield Hall and killed herself,<sup>13</sup> an incident that leaves Rochester blinded and without a hand. Therein lies the warning of the novel: proximity to the mad freak leads to the disintegration of the normative bourgeois home and the disfiguration of the normative white able-bodied male. In other words, proximity to the mad freak results in queer materiality: in the same way that the freak show destabilized normative forms of embodiment at the same time it attempted to reify those norms, here, the structures of normative material reality are destabilized and the normative body/mind materializes as an abnormal one.

This depiction of Bertha emerges out of a contemporary history of putting non-white women on display as “freaks” who become “freaks” precisely because their bodies exceed the boundaries of normative white Victorian womanhood. One example is the famous Julia Pastrana, often billed as the “bearded lady” or the “bear woman,” who for Victorian audiences, as Rebecca Stern writes, became an emblem of “an unsexed, nonwhite creature, a woman whose masculinity has pushed through her skin in the shape of ‘very pretty whiskers, moustache, and beard,’” informing the spectating public of “the monstrous spectacle all women have the potential to become” (216). This is queer materiality: Pastrana’s presence as an indigenous gender-defying “freak” ends up animating the flesh of the spectators themselves, as meeting the gaze of Pastrana threatens to potentially materialize the “normal” spectator as a queer body. And another

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<sup>13</sup> Gabbard asks us to consider Bertha’s suicide not in terms of “why the disabled Bertha is killed off according to the stereotypical ‘cure or kill; formula, but why those charged with her care are not doing a better job of preventing her from harming herself” (91-92).

historical example that Bertha is an echo of can be found, as Chen has already pointed out, in “The Hottentrot Venus,” Sara Baartman. Baartman was an early freak show attraction in the early nineteenth century who, as Anne McClintock writes, “in 1810...became the paradigm for the invention of the female body as an anachronism. The supposedly excessive genitalia of this woman ... were overexposed and pathologized” (41-42). Indeed, Baartman was made a “freak” precisely because her African body represented a racialized sexual excess that confounded normative European-American notions of women’s sexuality. Pastrana and Baartman’s exhibition as queer freaks even extended past their deaths, for Pastrana’s corpse was exhibited in a glass case in 1862 (Stern 214), while molds were made of Baartman’s genitalia and body which remained on display until as recently as 1982 (Lindfors 210). Perhaps it is these instances that make approaching the word “freak” an unsettling experience for Eli Clare. If we think of the body as “never singular, but rather haunted... by countless other bodies” as Clare asks us to do (11), then it becomes clear that these histories are enmeshed with each other and also persist past their death: that Bertha’s appearance in *Jane Eyre* is haunted by the exhibition of Pastrana and Baartman’s bodies, and in turn, the inextricability of queerness, race, and disability from the nineteenth century freak show continues to haunt and shape our perspectives of bodily difference to this day.

This is again to reiterate that queer materiality is ghostly and that the freak show is particularly haunting—the ways that bodies are materialized as “normal” or “abnormal” has lasting, material effects on our world that return and return. Clare astutely writes that “nature did not make them into freaks. The freak show did, carefully constructing an exaggerated divide between ‘normal’ and Other, sustained in turn by rubes willing to pay good money to stare” (87). And the materialization of that divide between “normal” and “Other,” once solidified, never fully

goes away, just as the corpse of Pastrana and the post-mortem molds of Baartman fail to dissipate from our cultural memories and realities, continuing to shape our relationship to bodily difference to this very day. As Avery Gordon writes in *Ghostly Matters*, “The ghost... is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence... of a ghost is that it has a *real presence* and *demand its due*” (xvi; emphasis added). In being made spectacle in the freak show, Pastrana and Baartman are made both “invisible” and “ineffable excess”—unable to be seen fully as humans past their bodily difference, bodies that extend and contort the accepted norms of embodiment— but more importantly, they are made ghosts with “a real presence” through a lasting queer materiality— their bodies continuing to be the contested site of separation between “normal” and “abnormal.” Their histories haunt our present moment, and “demand their due” in that they point us to the historical moment of the freak show, and ask us to witness and attend to the social forces that created and sustained such violent demarcations.

These demarcations that determined who was a “freak” and what types of bodies were “freakish” did not come about in isolation, but in fact were thoroughly intertwined, and this is especially true for queerness and racialization. It is important to understand that in the nineteenth century the proliferation of sexual abnormalities was mediated through racialized bodies, and in fact, racial difference and sexual difference were produced through each other. Of course, Foucault famously argues that the proliferation of sexological discourses in the late-nineteenth century led to the creation of new sexual identity categories defined in opposition to the norm (“the homosexual was now a species”) (43), but in *Queering the Color Line*, Siobhan Somerville invokes Baartman as an example of how “comparative anatomy located the boundaries of race through the sexual and reproductive anatomy of the African female body,” and that “the racial difference of the African body... was located in its literal excess, a specifically sexual excess that

placed her body outside the boundaries of the ‘normal’ female” (26). Somerville brings attention to how the emergence of “queerness” as gender and sexual deviance in the nineteenth century cannot be separated from the fact that gender and sexual norms were constructed through opposition to black and brown bodies. This is very much the case with Pastrana as well as other bearded or hairy black and indigenous women, for “the construction of nonwhite hirsute women as animalistic allowed spectators to associate them with a primitive, excessive sexuality” (Durbach 108).

This is significant because Bertha’s “madness” becomes visible as a spectral trace of her racialized body which is necessarily already marked as sexually queer. In *Caribbean Shadows and Victorian Ghosts*, Kathleen Renk writes that “Both females and colonies were considered prone to madness... sexual deviance in women defined insanity,” and that specifically, “the West Indian islands were thought to be places where ‘madness’ and sexual excess comingled” (89). And furthermore, it is not only racialized sexual excess in women that defines madness, it is also “perverse” spiritualities and beliefs in ghosts, as Renk writes, “[the] temporary loss of boundaries between the tangible and the intangible worlds... has been demonized by Western culture. Considered pagan, primitive, and associated with evil forces, spirit possession is considered a form of ‘madness’ because it is associated in the Western mind with a sexually ecstatic, transformative state” (102). And indeed, this is the case with Bertha, a woman from the West Indies, for as Mr. Rochester explains, “the doctors now discovered that *my wife* was mad— her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity” (353). For the medical establishment that makes a spectacle of her body, Bertha’s madness arises from the sexual excesses, the racialized sexual non-normativity, of her “freak” body. In the nineteenth century then, discourses

of madness are shaped by sexual excess and belief in the supernatural,<sup>14</sup> both of which are inextricably racialized and rendered queer in Victorian culture.

But racialized how, exactly? Bertha Mason is undeniably marked as “racially Other,” but otherwise her racialization remains fairly ambiguous. In fact, I argue that the racial ambiguity of Bertha’s body/mind is logically derived from freak show exhibits that intentionally blurred the line between blackness, whiteness, and indigeneity in an attempt to collapse racial differences under the sign of an ambiguous racial “Other.” This collapse of racial differences in the freak show functioned as a way to tie blackness and indigeneity to animality, as these exhibits posited racial freaks as the “missing link” in the evolutionary chain between apes and humans. In this way, the racial ambiguity of the “freak” offered to white audiences an example of the ultimate “Other” at the same time that it blurred the lines of racial difference. Race haunted the surface of the Victorian body/mind, queerly materializing the skin as a site of bodily and mental difference.

James Cook Jr’s scholarship on race and the freak show is elucidating here; in “Of Men, Missing Links, and Nondescripts,” he writes that the same “freak” would be used by Barnum to stage multiple racialized characters: “The short-lived London character was said to have been discovered in ‘the wilds of California,’ where ‘for the last 10 months it has been with a tribe of Indians.’ In New York, by contrast, Barnum shifted the character’s ‘habitat’ to ‘the African jungle’” (145). As previously noted, Barnum and other freak show exhibitors had little interest in accurately representing the origins and stories of the “freaks” exhibited. Instead, racialized “freaks” could be portrayed interchangeably as indigenous American or black African for different audiences; all that was needed was a change in the context of the exhibition in order to

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the séance was linked to sexual perversity: “Promiscuity was the rule in private séances, and the condition of darkness (widely accepted as one of the essential requisites for contacting the spirit world) enhanced the sense that the relationship between sitters and mediums might have sexual implications” (Natale 47)

materialize the same body as various races. This collapse of the differences between African blackness and American indigeneity in the freak show also mirrored a shift occurring in the Victorian consciousness at mid-century, in which “the African replaced the Native American in the Victorian mind as the quintessential savage” (Durbach 159). It is clear, then, that blackness and indigeneity were intimately connected, and even indistinguishable, in the Victorian mind.

The freak show’s play on racial difference also blurred the lines of whiteness and imperiled the boundaries surrounding who was considered “white.” This is most succinctly expressed by Stern, as she writes that one of the central effects of the freak show was the proliferation of the belief that “if one acted like a ‘savage,’ these exhibits implicitly suggested, one might well become one” (209-210).<sup>15</sup> This is significant because it speaks to the haunting effects of the racialized freak on the normalized white colonial body, and it is particularly illustrative of queer materiality, as contact with the freak destabilizes bodily categorization and thus threatens to materialize the white spectator as the “savage” on display. In the words of Durbach, “The freak was monstrous precisely because of the instability of its body: the freak could be both male and female, white and black, adult and child, and/or human and animal at the same time” (3). In the freak show, the body becomes the site of queer material, where the illusions that produce racial and gendered difference are both accentuated and blurred, a contradiction that reveals the artificiality of the boundary between “Self” and “Other,” thus leading to a society in which the “normative” white body can materialize as a “savage” body. Or,

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<sup>15</sup> This quote from Stern is excerpted from a longer discussion on Charles Dickens’ response to viewing the freak show: “Dickens demonstrates in his essay ‘The Noble Savage,’ [that exhibitions in which peoples of ‘foreign lands’ were put on display] effectively employed the threat of racializing the insurgent white body[...] Condemning the white Irish alongside the black Zulus for their collective lack of civilization, Dickens illustrates the ease with which the white body might take on the attributes of the savage. If one exceeded the parameters of civilized British behavioral codes, if one acted like a ‘savage,’ these exhibits implicitly suggested, one might well become one. The exhibition, therefore, was a form of public entertainment with the potential to be a powerful ideological tool” (209-210).



as Durbach says, “The construction of the white civilized / black savage imperial binary was heightened by patently fraudulent freak shows in which colonial bodies were literally manufactured for display” (149).

Race is further complicated in the freak show by exhibitions that were deliberately meant to be racially ambiguous, as the “origins” of some racialized freaks were said to be unknown as a way to titillate the curiosity of audiences. This is particularly the case with P.T. Barnum’s “What Is It?” exhibit. As Cook Jr writes, “Barnum located all of his character variations in some exotic, vaguely sketched, aboriginal context,” but the “What Is It” exhibit stretched this to its extremities, as “at the very core of Barnum’s [‘What Is It?’] idea was simply the desire to create a fundamentally *liminal* creature (‘the thing is not to be called anything by the exhibitor’), onto which numerous geographic, racial, and cultural templates could be applied” (144-145). In other words, “Barnum only offered *possibilities*” (149). And if Bertha Mason is a “freak” being presented to Victorian audiences, an echo of Pastrana and Baartman, is not *Jane Eyre* another venue in Victorian culture where only possibilities of racial difference are offered? Though we are given an origin story for Bertha by Rochester himself, the racial make-up of Bertha is never directly specified by either Jane or Rochester. Rather, Bertha is presented as a vaguely racialized body that only offers possibilities, and integral to Bertha’s racialization that tends to be overlooked but that the freak show and a close-reading of how Bertha is presented in the text can help emphasize is the presence of her indigeneity— an indigeneity that is inseparable from the production of her body/mind as a “mad freak.”

We are told that Bertha hails from Jamaica, and historically, indigenous Caribbean populations have been key in the cultural and social formations of the region. In “The Red Atlantic,” Jace Weaver notes that, “Indians, far from being marginal to the Atlantic experience,

were, in fact, as central as Africans. Native resources, ideas, and peoples themselves traveled the Atlantic with regularity and became among the most basic defining components of Atlantic cultural exchange” (422). Most compelling is Weaver’s formulation of indigenous agency in the slave trade. Weaver writes that French diplomacy with Natives was intertwined with the enslavement of indigenous peoples. Weaver writes, “The two systems were not divorced one from another but rather integrally related to each other” (435). What Weaver illuminates here is that, rather than being absent from the processes of colonization, slavery, and diaspora that shaped the Caribbean, Native indigenous populations were absolutely central to it.

And when it comes to the racialization of Caribbean peoples, and particularly the creation of Creole subjectivities (and significantly Bertha Mason is conventionally read as Creole), indigenous populations have been central in that regard as well, a fact that Shona Jackson is very much aware of in *Creole Indigeneity*. Jackson shows how the process of creolization in the Caribbean has never been distinct from that of indigenization, and historically, the privileging of Creole forms of belonging (which Jackson locates in labor and its humanizing effect in the system of liberal capitalism) ultimately marginalizes indigenous populations and erases their role in creolization. Deploying the term “Creole indigeneity” in order to upset this dichotomy, Jackson writes that, “[Creole indigeneity] rivets our attention to the evolution of Creole and native as interdependent yet oppositional identities that reproduce colonial geography and epistemology as natural. Thus, *Creole indigeneity is meant to capture the cultural, ethnic dimension of indigenous and nonindigenous identities where it intersects with and departs from their politicization as market identities*” (64; emphasis in original). In other words, “Creole indigeneity” becomes a useful term in highlighting the ways that these two identity categories cannot be separated from each other, but are in fact thoroughly intertwined. Indeed, invoking the

term “Creole indigeneity” is meant to disrupt the way that the erasure of indigeneity through creolization reproduces colonialist ideology— as the incorporation of Creole Caribbean life into the systems of labor and liberal capital is necessarily dependent upon the depiction of indigenous Caribbean populations and ways of being as premodern, conquered, and nonexistent. In other words, indigeneity is all too often disappeared, made into a ghost that haunts historical formulations and discussions of race.

Read in the historical context of indigenous presence in Caribbean history and Creole indigeneity, it is significant then that Bertha Mason’s racial ambiguity is articulated in Mr. Rochester’s description of Bertha as having a “black *and* scarlet visage” (357; emphasis mine). Not merely “black,” but “scarlet” as well, this description can be read as indicative of an ambiguity that echoes Barnum’s “What Is It?” exhibit and the practice of collapsing of blackness and indigeneity in the freak show— as her racialization inheres in a blackness that is inseparable from the “scarlet” tinge of indigeneity. And other moments abound where Bertha’s indigeneity is offered as a Barnum-esque *possibility*, but never stated outright. Jane famously describes Bertha as having “a savage face,” and she describes her as being “some strange wild animal” whose hair is “wild as a mane” (338). These descriptions quite clearly echo colonialist logics wherein the colonizers construct themselves as “civilized” and “human” in opposition to constructing black African and Native indigenous peoples as “savage,” “wild,” and “animalistic.” What is clear, then, is that *Jane Eyre’s* depiction of Bertha Mason acts as a simulation of how freak show exhibitors both obscured the race and origins of their “freaks” at the same time that they artificially accentuated their racialization and “Otherness.” Bertha Mason— black, white, indigenous, colonizer, colonized— none of these terms precisely fit. Instead, Bertha Mason’s

status as a “racial freak” allows her body to slip in and out of these categories depending on the context she is presented in by whoever is staging her as an exhibition for public consumption.

Ultimately, the significance of Bertha Mason’s racial slipperiness is two-fold: first, it points to how her racialization is produced through the phenomenon of queer materiality, where bodies materialize between the “normative” and the “abnormal”; and because of this, secondly, through her ambiguous racialization, Bertha’s madness is revealed to be queerly material. Referring back to Donaldson’s argument which I invoked at the beginning of this chapter, we cannot simply assert that Bertha’s madness is a material condition of her body. Rather, through the illusionist staging of the freak show, Bertha’s madness materializes on the surface of her body as a ghostly effect of her ambiguously black and indigenous racialization.

In the same way that the freak show queerly materialized race through deception and illusion, so too did the asylum and scientific observation rely on fakery to queerly materialize madness. In fact, in *Mind Fixers*, Anne Harrington notes that the history of psychiatry has always been, and still is, troubled by its inability to locate mental illness within the body. In one example of this, she notes that in 1880 Hippolyte Bernheim critiqued the psychologist Jean-Martin Charcot, who claimed to find the anatomical cause of female hysteria, by quipping that Charcot had “inadvertently created the symptoms he believed himself to have discovered; he had engaged in *an elaborate theater of illusions* that had nothing to do with the brain and nervous system and everything to do with patients’ suggestibility.” Charcot fired back, defending himself by saying “all I am is a photographer. *I describe what I see*” (21- 22; emphasis mine). In the nineteenth century, madness materializes on the surface on the body as a queer abnormality through visual epistemologies that demanded bodily and mental difference be cast out of the shadows and made visible. Charcot’s likening of himself to the photographer makes this very clear— visible

materiality is considered proof of “objectivity,” and if madness won’t make itself visible, then “an elaborate theater of illusions” will be employed to make it so, just as the “freak” was racialized through the elaborate theater of illusions that freak show exhibitors constructed in order to engage their audiences.

Renk has already illuminated how the West Indies colonies in particular were imagined as a site of racialized madness and sexual excess in the nineteenth century, and furthermore, we might suggest that blackness and indigeneity are already constructed as “mad” in the logics of white supremacist colonialism. In *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, Therí Alyce Pickens writes that “Madness becomes the place to engage [for black scholars and writers] because racism adheres to a particular kind of rationality, predicated on the long history of the Enlightenment and its material effects” (14). She later writes that “the human was ideologically designed to exclude indigenous peoples and Blacks” precisely because the idea of *the human* “ironically denies some humans a humanity according to Western European ideals, which are fundamentally anti-Black and sanist... For mad Black subjects, this definition of the human does not apply” (74-76). Or, as Colin King puts it in “Whiteness in Psychiatry,” the “lack of appreciation of the African body as a thinking entity reveals how whiteness defines me as less than human” (70). And thus, because black and indigenous peoples are excluded from Western ideals of *the human*, they become “mad” subjects whose bodies are inscrutable, indeed irrational, to the white colonizers. It is this inscrutable “madness” of black and indigenous bodies that allows Barnum’s “What Is It?” exhibit to exist in the first place, as the paying public are intrigued by the exhibit precisely because *even the doctors and scientists* are unable to solve the “visual riddle” of the mad freak (Cook Jr. 140).

### Conclusion

Invoking Ralph Ellison's statement that "[the] high visibility [of the African-American man] actually rendered one *un*-visible," and Toni Morrison's argument that "invisible things are not necessarily not-there," Gordon writes, "the highly visible can actually be a type of invisibility" and "that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence," all of which is to suggest that "ghosts are real, that is to say... they produce material effects" (17). Bertha Mason is the *un*-visible ghost, the hyper-visible mad racialized freak, haunting the attic of Thornfield Hall, haunting the imperialist colonialist reach of the British Empire, and haunting the "normative" white Victorian body/mind. Bertha Mason is not necessarily not-there—"Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist" (317)—for Rochester, by his own admission, attempts to make his wife disappear, to erase the reality of her mad freakery: "Let her identity... be buried in oblivion" (356). It is precisely this disappearance that the imperial colonialist system depends upon to reify itself as a "sane" and "normal" system—the "freaks" (indigenous, black, queer, disabled, mad, colonized) must serve as a contrast that then needs to be expelled, or disappeared, from the private, domestic home. Made into ghosts. As Gordon writes, "disappearance is a state-sponsored procedure for producing ghosts to harrowingly haunt a population into submission" (115). Do not be like the mad freak, or you too will disappear, says the colonial order.

But the problem with ghosts is that they don't go away—they haunt. Bertha appears in Jane's bedroom like a ghostly visitation, as Jane recounts "The *shape* standing before me had never crossed my eyes... the *contour* [was] new to me... I know not what dress she had on: it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell" (326; emphasis mine). Bertha makes her spectacular arrival in the novel as a vague "shape," a ghostly "contour," whose ambiguous dress mirrors the way Victorian body/minds queerly materialized corporeal

difference— she could be a beautiful bourgeois lady (“gown”), an eroticized ghost (“sheet”), or a melancholic risen cadaver (“shroud”)— and though she is anything *but* “white and straight,” wrapping herself in the “white and straight” garment signifies that the ghostly presence of her queer body can *produce material effects* on the “white and straight” Victorian body<sup>16</sup>— for, as Jane finds out, coming into contact with the mad freak can make “mental terrors” readable on the surface of her “normative” body/mind. Indeed, Rochester, who represents the wealthy colonialist order, uses Bertha to, in Gordon’s terms, *haunt Jane into submission*: after Jane tells Rochester the story of her meeting Bertha, Rochester replies: “[Bertha was] the creature of an over-stimulated brain; that is certain. I must be careful of you, my treasure: nerves like yours were not made for rough handling” (327). In other words, the masculinist colonialist order now threatens to perceive Jane, in many ways representative of the working-class feminine domestic populace,<sup>17</sup> as no longer within the bounds of the “normative,” to materialize her body as mad, queer, raced, freaky.

Not one to submit, Jane casts off Rochester's accusation that she is mad for witnessing Bertha's spectral materialization-- "Sir, depend upon it, my nerves were not at fault"-- and in doing so, she reinscribes the existence, and resistance, of the mad freak: "the thing was real: the

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, uniquely in Britain, “to respond to the moral campaign to control popular leisure, rising cultural interest in respectability, fears that deformed bodies housed immoral characters, and growing concerns about degeneracy, Victorian showmen... made human oddities seem worthy of their spectators by insisting... these exhibition stars were exemplary participants in bourgeois culture,” which included dressing them in bourgeois gowns (McHold 31). One wonders to what degree this collapse of the “freakish” with the “respectable” heightened bourgeois Victorian anxieties around the separation of self and Other.

<sup>17</sup> As McClintock shows in *Imperial Leather*, “Women who transgressed the Victorian boundary between public and private, labor and leisure...became increasingly stigmatized as species of *racial* regression. Such women, it was contended, did not inhabit history proper [or were, in other terms, disappeared] but were the prototypes of anachronistic humans: childlike, irrational, regressive and atavistic, existing in a permanently anterior time within modernity. Female domestic servants were frequently depicted in the iconography of degeneration— as ‘plagues,’ ‘black races,’ ‘slaves’ and ‘primitives’” (42). In this way, then, the “degenerate” classes of Victorian society risked becoming the “mad freaks,” haunted by the possibility that their body-mind could queerly materialize.

transaction actually took place" (328). The "transaction" suggests here a two-way exchange-- or, in other words, the freak stares back, and in doing so, demands the recognition and the *un-*disappearance of her own heterogeneous, complex personhood— her ghostly, because infinite, fleshiness. As Gordon writes, "Complex personhood means that all people...are beset by contradiction... that even those called 'Other' are never never that... that even those who haunt our dominant institutions... are haunted too by things they sometimes have names for and sometimes do not" (5). Indeed, the freak show, and the queer materiality of the Victorian body/mind, offered only haunting possibilities.



## CHAPTER TWO: MATERIALIZING QUEER WORLDS WITH LUCY SNOWE'S MAD SENSES

*Introduction*

“If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed,” so declares the lonely and melancholic Lucy Snowe of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, just after burying the letters from her unrequited love, Dr. John, at the foot of Methusaleh, the “grey, gaunt” and “very old” pear-tree in the garden of the Rue Fossette boarding school. “I was not only going to hide a treasure—I meant also to bury a grief,” explains Lucy, who, after looking at Methusaleh while pondering how to keep her love letters out of the wide reach of the surveilling gazes of Madame Beck and M. Paul, has “one of those queer fantastic thoughts that will sometimes strike solitary people.” Her plan? To place the letters in a jar and “inter” them in a “deep hollow” near the roots of the pear-tree, finishing the act by covering the hole with a cement slate, black mould, and ivy. “This done,” writes Lucy, “I rested, leaning against the tree; lingering, like any other mourner, beside a newly-sodded grave” (327-329).

This scene, wherein Lucy gives a ceremonial burial that is meant not only to protect her interior feelings and desires from being pried into by those who hold power over her, but also to physically seal off the pain of false hopes and spurned love that “vanish[ed] like a false mirage” (328), is representative of the core concerns of Brontë’s 1853 novel: how the melancholia of social exclusion gives rise to “queer fantastic thoughts”; how these queer thoughts push their originator to carve out private spaces in the world where their socially-suppressed griefs and passions can find exterior existence; how grieving is an open wound and emotional process that exposes the irrationality of delineating between past, present, and future; and how spectral is the nature of human attachments to other humans, places, and time. Indeed, the very old and gaunt

pear-tree, Methuselah, becomes a symbol of the above concerns, for the tree is located in the “forbidden alley,” and is none other than “the nun’s pear tree” (327). Methuselah belongs to the fabled ghost nun of the Rue Fossette, and in fact the hollow at the base of the tree “was the portal of a vault, emprisoning deep beneath that ground... the bones of a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear middle ages had here buried alive, for some sin against her vow” (118). Thus, the only space where Lucy is able to bury and make room for her private thoughts, feelings, and griefs is the same space that contains the bones of the undead— a nun trapped between life and death for her sexual transgressions against a restrictive social order. In this moment, the violence of the past and the pain of the present co-exist through the mourning of what has been lost due to the strictures of the social world: the forbidden desires and loves that only materialize as memorials to the queer lives that *were* and *could have been*.

The love that Lucy buries in the garden, the love she holds for Dr. John, is a forbidden desire that is indeed, queer. Though Lucy’s love for Dr. John is a longing toward the normative— a desperate attempt to become a legitimate subject of the normative order through union with a paragon of stereotypical bourgeois male beauty and success— it is precisely the impossibility of this union that marks her as queer.<sup>18</sup> Brontë’s own letters concerning the novel

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<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Lucy’s love for Dr. John is queer because it reveals her unwillingness to conform to normative Victorian gender roles. As Sharon Marcus notes in *Between Women*, the expected behavior amongst Victorian women was that they would cultivate friendships amongst each other in order to bring about the heterosexual union. Marcus writes, “Female friendships peaceably coexisted with heterosexual marriages and moreover, helped to promote them” and that Victorian narratives particularly “considered them crucial to realizing marriages between men and women” (2, 18). This was embedded within the expectations of what it meant to be a woman, as “friendship was as important an aspect of femininity as being a daughter, wife, and mother” (16). Significantly, Lucy Snowe holds none of these typical roles of Victorian femininity— not daughter, not wife, not mother, and even not a friend. Indeed, for Marcus, Lucy becomes the example par excellence of transgression against the norm of friendship between women: “Lucy’s queerness is distinctly Victorian: it inheres in an anomalous distaste for women’s love” (102). This distaste becomes never more apparent than in the rivalry she cultivates with Madame Beck over their shared desire for Dr. John’s hand in marriage. Marcus notes, “Nothing may seem more natural to us than female rivalry over men, but nothing seemed more odd to Victorian readers, who found Lucy Snowe unaccountably ‘morbid’... especially in her ‘bitterness’ towards other women” (106). In this way, Lucy becomes a mad freak to the Victorian audience, as “in Victorian fiction, it is only the woman with no bosom friend who risks

reveal as much: “Lucy must not marry Dr. John... he is far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited and sweet-tempered: he is a ‘curled darling’ of Nature and of Fortune: he must draw a prize in Life’s Lottery; his wife must be young, rich and pretty; he must be made very happy indeed... I am not leniently disposed towards [Lucy Snowe]— from the beginning I never intended to appoint her lines in pleasant places” (qtd. in Barker 832). From the outset, Lucy’s desire for Dr. John, for the golden boy whose destination in domestic happiness has never been in question, is a fantasy that could never be fulfilled within a world constructed by the normative order. By Brontë’s own admission, Lucy is not made for happiness; indeed, she is made for melancholy and madness. It is for this reason that the scene in the garden is so poignant: Lucy symbolically seals off her desire for normativity in a self-made tomb, and in doing so, she creates the necessary space to both acknowledge her own queer subjectivity and feel the sadness that unfulfilled desire and failed sociality instill.

If Chapter One theorized a queer materiality in which normative notions of a stable material reality are undermined by the “mad” and the “freakish,” then Chapter Two investigates the significance of queer materiality to the queer, mad Victorian subject. In the above example, Lucy attempts to carve out a space in the world where her griefs and desires can attain material existence, but in order to do so, she must materialize these feelings in a way that will be unperceivable to the normative and disciplinary surveilling gaze of the headmistress, Madame Beck. The solution? Bury the letters in the “forbidden alley” alongside the bones of the nun who was buried alive. Lucy’s “queer fantastic thoughts”— her *mad senses*— allow her to ascertain that her queer feelings cannot lead a material existence sanctioned by the normative order, and must instead be materialized in a grave within a forbidden area of the school, a space where

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becoming, like Lucy Snowe, one whom no man will ever clasp to his heart in marriage, a friendless woman who remains perpetually outside the bosom of the family” (Marcus 108).

Madame Beck wouldn't think or desire to look precisely because of the bad feelings and histories that lie there. Just as the nun can only exist between life and death, between materiality and immateriality, outside the normative order yet within its confines, so too can Lucy's letters—her feelings, her griefs, her pasts and presents—only find material existence through their virtual non-existence, a queer life sealed off from the visible world, but never sealed off from Lucy's own interior life and the way she senses the world around her; for, just as Lucy will be haunted by the ghost nun who acts as a reminder of her own "sins" and queer solitude, so too will Lucy be haunted by her unrequited feelings for Dr. John, as she struggles to conduct single-handed her war against life. Lucy's mad senses allow her to perceive and construct a queerly material world—a world where time, space, thought, and feeling need not adhere to the normative social order, but also a world where the griefs and loneliness of leading a queer existence are haunting realities that must be reckoned with and atoned for.

As Athena Vrettos puts it in *Somatic Fictions*, Lucy's burial of the letters is the most salient example of her "acts of containment," one of many throughout the text, that allow her to engage in "reconstructions of her relationship to a threatened material and personal reality" (62). For Vrettos, Lucy is an example of how Victorian women coped with "hysteria" and "neurosis," writing that Lucy's maladies "occur in the uncharted spaces between physical reality and psychological interpretations of that reality," and that her struggles with her mental health cause her "to experience [her] own physicality as potentially alien and radically unstable"; as a result, she responds by "reshap[ing] her threatened reality into more concrete and durable forms" (60-61). What Vrettos points to here can be explained by the concept of queer materiality— in Chapter One, I explained that queer materiality emerges within the gap between the felt sense of the body and the body-as-perceived, a space where the materiality of the body is always

undergoing (re)construction; and here, we see that same gap turned outward, as Lucy's sense of her own material reality is imperiled by the disjuncture between her own thoughts, feelings, perceptions of the world around her and the ways of being that are sanctioned as "real" and made perceivable by the social order. In other words, Lucy's queer materiality inheres in her assertion that her queer feelings *are* material— real, substantive, and significant— in a world where they are made to *seem* all but immaterial. Throughout *Villette*, Lucy acts primarily as an observer, rarely drawing the reader's attention to her own body, instead attempting to find some reflection of herself in the people and objects constituting the reality around her— some evidence that she, indeed, exists and *can* exist within the material world.

Just as I have shown that the normative Victorian body was haunted by the possibility of materializing as a queer subject, in Lucy we can see the reverse— that the Victorian queer subject is haunted by the possibility that they might not materialize *at all*. It is for this reason that Lucy engages in the "acts of containment" that Vrettos identifies— in creating spaces where her thoughts and feelings can exist materially while also being closed off from the perception of the normative social order, Lucy is able to (re)construct the materiality of her world, and in doing so, asserts her own queer existence. But it is also the possibility of not materializing as a proper subject of the social order that drives Lucy to madness. As Vrettos notes, Lucy's "confrontations with the supernatural are assigned neurological causation" (60). This link between neurological disorder and visions of the supernatural was typical of the nineteenth century, as Shane McCorristine notes in *Spectres of the Self*: "behind the debates over spectral illusions<sup>19</sup> lay the uneasy worry that ghost-seeing could be a symptom of incipient insanity" (49). Lucy's visions of the ghost nun do more than simply underscore her mental and psychic pain however, as ghost-

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<sup>19</sup> The nineteenth century theory of spectral illusions argued "that apparitions were to be traced to disorders and diseases of the human bodily apparatus" (McCorristine 44)

seeing and madness were seen *not* as benign variation in individual biological make-up, endemic to how the ghost-seer perceived the world around them; instead, as McCorristone notes, “dreaming, delirium, hypnotism, reverie, abstraction, ghost-seeing and indeed insanity were all essentially down to a lack of will-power within the mind of the percipient” (79). This, then, is the core of the issue: as I will show in this chapter, the ghost nun comes to haunt Lucy for the way she reflects Lucy’s own deviance from the social order— a threatening reminder of the unstable, and indeed queer, materiality of existing outside of the normative— the very real possibility of non-existence. But more than that, the appearance of the ghost-nun reveals something spookier: that Lucy has lost control over her own body and senses, unable to possess the *will-power* to mold herself into a proper subject of Victorian womanhood whose thoughts and feelings are granted material reality under the rationalist discourse and scientific order of the nineteenth century. Over the course of *Villette*, Lucy will come to trust in her own loss of control and her own unwieldy perceptions: she will follow the paths that her mad senses lead her down and will assert the queer materiality of her reality through her contestations with the disciplinary social order and through the (re)construction of her own private world.

It is no coincidence then that after burying the letters in the hollow beside Methuselah the ghost nun makes her presence again known to Lucy. It is a scene that mirrors an earlier one in the novel— in the first instance, Lucy receives her initial letter from Dr. John, she takes it up to the garret of the Rue Fossette to read it in privacy, and upon opening the letter, she sees the ghost nun for the first time, shrieks and drops the letter, and after recounting the sighting of the nun to Dr. John, he diagnoses her with a case of “spectral illusions” (272-278). In the scene in the forbidden alley, Lucy has a different reaction as she comes face to face with the ghost nun again:

Five minutes passed. I neither fled nor shrieked. She was there still. I spoke.

‘Who are you? and why do you come to me?’

She stood mute. She had no face— no features: all below her brow was masked with a white cloth; but she had eyes, and they viewed me.

I felt, if not brave, yet a little desperate; and desperation will often suffice to fill the post and do the work of courage. I advanced one step. I stretched out my hand, for I meant to touch her. She seemed to recede. I drew nearer: her recession, still silent, became swift [...] I said,-- ‘If you have any errand to me, come back and deliver it.’ Nothing spoke or re-appeared.

This time there was no Dr. John to whom to have recourse: there was no one to whom I dared whisper the words, ‘I have again seen the nun’ (329-330).

*Villette* is very much a novel about personal, individual growth, and specifically, about how the queer subject learns to move through, and exist within, oppressive institutional structures that isolate and invisibilize the queer. While Lucy’s first reaction to seeing the nun who committed “some sin against her vow” is to be afraid of the queer subjectivity and queer materiality she reflects and to allow a medical doctor to declare her nerves at fault and label her mental state delusional; in the second instance, Lucy does not turn away from the nun. Instead, just as the buried letters occupy the same heterotopic<sup>20</sup>, timeless space as the bones of the nun, Lucy occupies a space of silence with the nun in the forbidden alley as time is suspended for a full five

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<sup>20</sup> In “Of Other Spaces,” Michel Foucault theorizes of spaces in the world, which he calls “heterotopias,” that have temporary utopian functions. While “utopias are sites with no real place” that are “fundamentally unreal,” Foucault theorizes of heterotopias, which are “counter-sites,” or, “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites... are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (3). Thus, while utopias, as pure, ulterior spaces, are necessarily of the imagination, heterotopias exist in reality, but in some way possess a quality of the utopic “unreal” in that they are located somewhere outside the hegemonic control of real spaces. Both constituted by disciplinary society and contesting its control, heterotopic spaces enable a reorientation and temporary resistance to the social orderings of institutions. The “forbidden alley” here acts as a heterotopic space enabling Lucy’s meeting with the ghost nun and the reorientation of her (queer) material world outside the surveillance apparatuses of the Rue Fossette.

minutes. It is Lucy who attempts to communicate with the nun— to physically touch the nun in order to prove both the nun’s reality and her own.

By this point, Lucy has already been advised: the nun is not real, merely a hallucination of overworked nerves, a delusion arising from the abnormal workings of a queer body/mind. After burying and “containing” her passions and griefs in the nun’s grave, constructing a queer materiality for her interiority, Lucy’s stoicism in the face of the ghost nun, and indeed her desire to make physical contact with the nun, is one of her earliest acts of mad, queer resistance: instead of accepting the medical man’s assertion that the nun is a hallucination, Lucy incorporates the ghost nun as a part of her (queer) material reality— a real being that can be touched, spoken to, and understood. In other words, rather than accept the reality that the social order attempts to construct for her, in which her perceptions of her own world are “abnormal” and indeed irrational, Lucy believes in her *mad senses*— for the first (and last) time in the novel, she looks the ghost in the eyes, and the ghost looks back. In a rationalist era of visual epistemologies, to meet the ghost’s gaze is to believe in the reality of *this* moment, of *this* space— it is to say that “Other” worlds are possible: worlds where the queer subject can find companionship and recognition of their own materiality. And most importantly, Lucy need not make sense of this encounter with the nun through confessing the vision to the doctor; instead, she keeps it to herself, as her own self-constructed queer materiality makes mad sense enough.

In this chapter, I will draw on nineteenth century contexts of the treatment of madness and psychological aberration, as well as queer theories of time, space, and perception, in order to chart Lucy’s articulation of a queer subjectivity within the normative social orderings of institutional power, as well as to follow Lucy’s evolving embracement of her mad senses, and the way she transforms and (re)creates her material worlds through trusting in those senses.



Ultimately, I hope to show that, in embracing bad feeling, melancholia, ghost-seeing, disorientation, and madness, the nineteenth century queer subject can create new possibilities for existing and being outside the constraints of ordered linear time and the excessive materiality and disciplinary regulations of bourgeois institutional spaces.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon writes that “Haunting is an encounter in which you touch the ghost or the ghostly matter of things: the ambiguities, the complexities of power and personhood, the violence and the hope, the looming and receding actualities, the shadows of our selves and our society. When you touch the ghost or the ghostly matter (or when it touches you)... the *madness* and the *feeling for what is at stake* is what [you] will finally encounter” (134-135). Let us then touch the ghost— and encounter the madness.

### *Queer Madness*

In her foundational text of second-wave feminist criticism, *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter pays particular attention to Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* for the way it uniquely reflects Victorian institutional disciplinary controls to “explore the psychological contradictions in nineteenth century women’s lives.” Showalter writes that in 1853, the same year of *Villette*’s publication, “Brontë had visited both Petonville prison and Bethlem, and she had seen how frighteningly effective solitary confinement could be.” Indeed, the use of solitary confinement to control both prisoners in the penitentiaries and patients in the asylum was a prevalent technique by mid-century. Showalter notes that “During the 1840s, the punishment of solitary confinement had been widely publicized as an effective and ‘humane’ form of penal discipline at model prisons in England... and as a useful technique for quieting patients in ‘moral’ asylums”; and in the Pentonville prison in London that Brontë visited, “convicts sometimes spent their entire

sentences alone, unable to speak to each other or to the outside world. Prison officials praised the method as a nonviolent, efficient form of control” that could break down prisoners’ psychological resistance (69).

The fact that solitary confinement was seen as a *nonviolent* method is particularly useful here; for, in fact, the asylum underwent substantial reforms around mid-century. Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth note that the Lunacy Acts of 1845 were reform measures that “called for the mandatory construction of public, county asylums, and set up a national Lunacy Commission to regulate and inspect all asylums, both private and public” (227). The effect of these reforms was ultimately “the substitution of surveillance for physical restraint” and the “internalization of social controls” (Showalter 49; Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth 227). In other words, by mid-century, the use of violence— in terms of physical acts of violence against the body, such as in the form of restraints— had fallen out of favor in dealing with asylum patients, and this alongside the rise of surveillance and social controls very much had its roots in the shifting beliefs of madness itself. According to Showalter:

The triple cornerstones of Victorian psychiatric theory and practice were moral insanity, moral management, and moral architecture. “Moral insanity” redefined madness, not as a loss of reason, but as deviance from socially accepted behavior. “Moral management” substituted close supervision and paternal concern for physical restraint and harsh treatment, in an effort to re-educate the insane in habits of industry, self-control, moderation, and perseverance. “Moral architecture” constructed asylums as therapeutic environments in which lunatics could be controlled without the use of force (29).

By mid-century, madness was an issue of the morals— something to be conquered by individual will-power and an adherence to institutionally-sanctioned behaviors and ways of being. In order

to get patients to adhere to the normative social order, and in order to discourage patients' "deviant" behaviors, the Victorian asylum shifted the way it wielded power away from the physical control of the body and toward the social and psychological control of the mind.

Importantly, this shift in the administration of power was not isolated to the asylum and the prison, but was instead reflective of a wider change in society, coinciding with the rise of institutions and bourgeois bureaucracy. This is the argument that Foucault famously makes in *The History of Sexuality*, writing that by the nineteenth century, "The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life. During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines— universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops... Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'biopower'" (140). This emerging focus on the control of populations through the disciplinary techniques of institutions was widespread. As Andrew Scull notes in *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen*, the Victorian shift towards "biopower" and the control of bodies through the internalization of social norms led to parallel "contemporaneous shifts in the treatment of the normal and other deviant elements of the population." In particular, "The faith in the capacity for human improvement through social and environmental manipulation was translated in a variety of settings— factories, schools, prisons, asylums— into the development of a whole array of temporally coincident and structurally similar techniques of social discipline" (113-114). It is significant that the new "moral management" of the mad was itself a symptom of larger social shifts in disciplinary controls— in attempting to eradicate "deviant" behaviors through the internalization of social norms and the psychological manipulations of surveillance, the "biopower" of the nineteenth century not only

standardized the “normative” through the social arrangements of institutional power, providing no “outside” to social control, it also brought the “normative” and the “deviant” into close contact with one another, as the line between the two was now as thin as the will-power of the individual. In other words, anyone could slip into deviancy if they failed to follow the acceptable behaviors sanctioned by the institutions— any “normal” person anywhere could become “deviant” if caught in an act of aberrance by the surveilling gaze of biopower.

It is this surveilling gaze, and the way that behaviors became singled-out and classified as “deviant,” that gives rise to the proliferation of forms and categories of mental disorder over the course of the nineteenth century, and this was especially true for women. In 1840, one physiologist, Thomas Laycock, when writing on the “nervous diseases of women” wrote that, given the “natural susceptibility” of women to mental disorder, there is “little room left for surprise at the infinite variety of evanescent forms, which... the diseases of the nervous system assume” (Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth 189). This description of nervous disorder— as infinite and evanescent— underscores the haunting and spectral nature of mental illness during the period. As I explained in Chapter One, mental illness was particularly difficult for the Victorians to pin down and observe, with the emergence of physiognomy and phrenology as sciences attempting to uncover the readable bodily and somatic roots of mental disorder, and the emerging fear that the normative Victorian body/mind could materialize as a mad subject. These fears alongside the proliferation of types of mental illnesses both in large part originate from the historical shifts in how the mad were treated by the classical period leading into the nineteenth century. In his *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault identifies the Renaissance “ship of fools” as an attempt to banish the mad to the extremities of society, confined to the aquatic space, an image of watery exile that nevertheless “haunted the imagination of Western man” (15). By the

time the mad become confined to the asylum, no longer banished to the extremities of space yet still excluded from *within* society, madness becomes a visible part of the social body, and as Lynne Huffer writes in *Mad For Foucault*, “The fear of the other— of unreason itself— becomes the fear *within*, marked by ‘the imaginary mark of illness’ to which everyone is susceptible” (53; emphasis added).

It is this move towards madness as “the fear within”— within the body politic, within the individual body/mind— that erodes the already thin dividing line between the “sane” and “insane,” reason and unreason, and necessitates the use of surveillance as a disciplinary control over populations in order to identify and eliminate the signs of madness wherever they may arise.<sup>21</sup> An example of just how haunting this fear of madness lurking within the confines of “normal” society could be can be found in the 1875 writings of Victorian physician Andrew Wynter on the “The Borderlands of Insanity,” writing that, “There are thousands who, lacking the opportunity or the power of will, never indeed do cross the frontier [into insanity], but remain and swell the vast army of undiscovered lunatics which leavens unsuspectedly the sane population” (Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth 281). Intriguing here is the suggestion that, even if the “insane” exert the expected “self-control,” avoiding aberrational behaviors in order to *appear* “normal,” still the so-called “undiscovered lunatics” remain a threatening presence from within the “sane” population, hauntingly unidentifiable.

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<sup>21</sup> As Sally Shuttleworth writes in *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Society*, “in the nineteenth century [madness] became increasingly an internal, psychological divide. The border to be policed was not so much between self and other, as between the conscious and unconscious self. If all individuals were liable to eruptions of insanity, the only visible sign one could cling to that one was not insane would be one’s capacity to exert self-control” (35). It is for this reason, then, that “moral management” becomes the prevailing psychiatric doctrine of the period, as the internalization of norms and disciplinary controls becomes essential to maintaining that internal dividing line that Shuttleworth identifies.

It is also from this fear *within* that disorders such as “monomania,” “partial insanity,” and “spectral illusions” are able to be named and codified in the nineteenth century. According to Janet Oppenheim, “‘monomania,’ or partial insanity, [was] ‘a single pathological preoccupation in an otherwise sound mind’” (56). Shuttleworth, too, identifies monomania as a “partial insanity” that “could possibly exist within the compass of normal daily life” (229). In this way, for the first time “sanity” and “madness” could co-exist within the same space, indeed within the same body/mind, in the nineteenth century. Importantly, “spectral illusions” were one of these key forms of partial insanity, as McCorristine notes that by the early nineteenth century, physicians used “methods of physiology to explain these occurrences [of spectral illusions] among persons classed as ‘normal’ and sane” (44). Here we see again the anxious impulse to analyze and read the body in order to uncover the “somatic roots” of insanity, as well as to localize and contain madness to particular sections of the body/mind, allowing individuals to remain “sane” subjects through the quarantining of their “unreason.” By the year 1850, it was generally regarded that it was “easy... for a sane person to experience spectral illusions,” and it is this idea of a “continuum” between sanity and insanity, rather than a fixed boundary, that becomes the “lasting legacy of the spectral illusions model” (McCorristine 50). Seeing ghosts by itself did not necessarily a mad subject make, yet it is also true that seeing ghosts was a sign of the haunting presence of madness lodged somewhere within the fabric of the body/mind.

It is for these reasons above stated that, by the nineteenth century, the mind and the space of interiority itself was suffused with ghosts. McCorristine writes that the end of the eighteenth-century, moving into the nineteenth century, heralded in “the new conception of the mind as a haunted entity, a transformation in our idea of consciousness which [literary critic Terry] Castle describes as the ‘ghostifying’ of mental space” (35). Indeed, according to Elton Smith and

Robert Haas in *The Haunted Mind*, the nineteenth century saw “a progression in the Victorian concept of the supernatural from an exterior, often physically manifested force acting upon characters to an interior, psychological power” (viii). It is for this reason that, in *Villette*, when Dr. John diagnoses Lucy’s vision of the ghost nun as “a case of spectral illusion,” Lucy responds, “You think then... that she came out of my brain, and is now gone in there, and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her?” (278). Important here is the way Lucy conceptualizes the nun as *coming out* of her brain, and then receding back in, lurking within her interiority, haunting the inner fabric of her mind. It is not only a testament to how the mind was “ghostified” through the concept of partial insanity, it also points to how the external material world could become reshaped by the mad sense of the interior, as the nun does not linger solely within Lucy’s body/mind, but instead “comes out” and enacts an exchange between the exterior and interior spaces of her reality— a queer materiality, indeed. But just as important is the suggestion that the nun might *glide out again* when Lucy least expects it, and especially when she “look not for her.” Lucy articulates the concept of willpower and self-control within the doctrine of “moral management”— unless Lucy retains complete control over her body/mind at all times, practicing a self-surveillance that could continuously “look” for the nun and confine it from within, it is almost inevitable that the nun will “glide out” again, reshaping the material world and threatening to push Lucy over the thinning borderline into madness.

Given all that has been said here with regard to the doctrine of “moral management,” the implementation of surveillance as a disciplinary control, and the ever-tenuous boundary between “normative” sanity and mad aberration, it should be no surprise that the nineteenth century asylum’s “most significant innovation,” according to Showalter, “was the domestication of insanity” (28). Showalter writes that the domestication of the asylum sought to “bring madness

into the circle of the *familiar* and the *everyday*, and to restructure the systems for its treatment in domestic terms,” a process that relied on the “family model,” wherein medical superintendents playing the role of parents while patients acted as their children (28; emphasis added). In sum, “the most important feature of the asylum, one doctor wrote, was its ‘homishness’” (Showalter 28). Essential to controlling the image of domesticity in the asylum was its focus on “moral architecture,” or, a strict and deliberate ordering of the asylum space in order to produce the façade of “homishness.” One mid-century description of the asylums in *The Lancet* wrote that “It is by domestic control, by surroundings of the daily life, by such details as the colouring of walls, the patterns on floorcloth, the furniture and the decoration of rooms... by moulding and controlling the life of a lunatic, the psychologist hopes to reach, capture, and re-educate the truant mind” (Showalter 34). Nancy Tomes identifies the mid-century writings of Thomas Kirkbride as especially representative of this philosophy of “moral architecture.” She writes that “Kirkbride sought to control every aspect of the hospital environment. Every detail, from the design of the window frames to the table settings in the ward dining rooms, had to be arranged to sustain the impression that here was an institution where patients received kind and competent care” (Scull 124). Kirkbride himself wrote that “everything connected with [the asylum], indeed, are parts of the great whole; and in order to secure harmony, economy and successful results, every one of them must be under the same control” (Scull 136).

Important here is the idea that, through domestication, and through a meticulous ordering of space meant to imitate the inviting warmth and normalizing influence of the Victorian hearth, the mad patient could be persuaded through moral means into adhering to the behavioral and psychic norms of bourgeois institutional power. If by mid-century the prevailing ideology of madness is that it shares the same space as sanity, and indeed arises from *within* the body politic



through a lack of will-power on the part of the individual, then the solution becomes to exert control over the interiority of the patient through manipulating the material exterior spaces they exist within. To bring the mad subject into the “familiar” and the “everyday” is to promote the expected normalized behaviors of those everyday spaces. Ultimately, the purpose and effect of this “homishness” of the Victorian asylum was to further entrench the practices of surveillance and “moral management” as means of disciplinary power. This is evident in the “family model” and the way patients were expected to play the role of children, as such imitation of the bourgeois family exerts paternalistic control over the expected behaviors of the patients, as well as endorsing the patriarchal heterosexist social order as a “normalizing” force to which the mad should submit if they wish to become “sane” or perceived as such.<sup>22</sup>

Brontë’s *Villette* is ultimately a novel critiquing the new “moral management” of the Victorian era and the way institutional power wielded control over individuals’ interior lives through psychological manipulation in order to produce “normalized” subjects. Earlier in this section, I showed how this shift towards surveillance and biopower was not isolated to the asylum but was instead the result of a wider societal shift, and we can see in the “domestication”

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<sup>22</sup> One other salient example of how “domesticity” was wielded as a method of surveillance can be found in the practice of the “lunatic balls.” According to Showalter, “The most popular form of asylum recreation was the lunatics’ ball, a dance held for inmates, attendants, and often visitors. Journalists went frequently, notebook in hand, to the festivities prepared to display the moral asylum at its best,” and she further notes that, “For most observers, the fascination of the lunatics’ ball was the *illusion of normality* it presented. Seen at such close range and in holiday settings, madness was no longer a gross and unmistakable inversion of appropriate conduct, but a collection of disquieting gestures and postures” (38-40; emphasis added). The lunatics’ ball became “the demonstration *par excellence* of the Victorian asylum’s exercise of disguised control.” One observer in the ball noted the effectiveness of this control, and the melancholy of it, in the way that “many exterior signs betray the disorder of thought, and scarcely permit a mistake to be made” (Showalter 49). Indeed, the Victorian asylum was constructed through queer materiality— the strict orderings of the asylum, its uncanny imitative façade and surveilling functions, attempted to mask the queer madness that lurked beneath the material exterior— in presenting the *illusion of normality* amongst the patients, and in exhibiting for public spectacle the effectiveness of this illusion and the disciplinary controls that constructed it, the asylum further eroded the dividing line between sanity and madness to microscopic “disquieting gestures and postures” while also heightening the anxiety that any “normative” spectator could materialize as the “mad freak” on display, further entrenching the need for strict surveillance of the body/mind in order to police that ever-eroding boundary.

of the asylum an example of just how interpenetrated these institutional systems were with one another, as the asylum's "family model" appropriated the social controls of the bourgeois family for its own uses. This interpenetration of institutional power is very much reflected in *Villette*—for, even though the Rue Fossette is a boarding school and *not* an asylum, the order of the school is maintained through the same surveillance and moral management that constructed institutional life in the nineteenth century, and by the end of the novel, the Rue Fossette becomes to Lucy nothing more than a "prison," the classrooms become "great dreary jails," and as she attempts to escape the school, Lucy is haunted by the sufferings inside of it, for being "so close" to the "dungeon" she can still "hear the prisoners moan" (498-499). It is useful here to recall Brontë's visits to the Petonville prison and Bethlem asylum prior to the publication of *Villette*, and how much of an impression the use of solitary confinement made on her (Showalter 69). Indeed, it is ultimately Lucy's solitude that drives her to melancholy, and while this solitude is partially the result of Lucy's queer affect and her inability to assimilate into the normative social roles available to women, it is also the result of the surveilling tactics of the institution that keeps her from finding companionship (as is evidenced in her burial of Dr. John's letters after they are discovered by the headmistress) and it is this effected solitude that drives her to declare: "One evening— and I was not delirious: I was in my sane mind, I got up— I dressed myself, weak and shaking. The solitude and the stillness of the dormitory could not be borne any longer; the ghostly white beds were turning into spectres" (177). Driven into solitude by both her isolating queerness and the institutional control over her thoughts and feelings, Lucy finds haunting and ghostly the very *furniture* of the school; the strict ordering of its "moral architecture" becomes impossible to bear, and she makes one of her earliest acts of resistance in the novel in declaring that she was "not delirious" and in her "sane mind"— for, in saying so, she implies that her

melancholy and psychic pain are “sane” feelings and rational reactions to the solitary confinement imposed upon her by the social order.

The character of Madame Beck, the headmistress of the school, becomes the major figure embodying institutional power, bourgeois order, and the way it is enforced. The first time we encounter Madame Beck in the novel, it is when Lucy first arrives at the Rue Fossette, and she is startled by the silent and unassuming presence of Madame: “No ghost stood beside me, nor anything of spectral aspect; merely a motherly, dumpy little woman, in a large shawl, wrapping-gown, and a clean, trim night cap” (73-74). And then she tells us, “[Madame] looked well, though a little bourgeoisie: as bourgeoisie indeed she was” (79). This initial description of Madame Beck as “no ghost” will soon be contrasted by the haunting power she wields, and her “motherly” aspect belies the control she seeks to exert over Lucy and the other subjects of her boarding-school, a conflation of the bourgeois family with institutional power that recalls the “domestication” and “family model” of the asylum. Lucy describes Madame’s tactics of control and power over the boarding school in the following terms: “It is true that madame had her own system for managing and regulating this mass of machinery; and a very pretty system it was: the reader has seen a specimen of it, in that small affair of turning my pocket inside out, and reading my private memoranda. ‘Surveillance,’ ‘espionage,’ – these were her watch-words” (80). And she further describes that, “[Madame] was sick, she would declare, of the means [of surveillance] she had to use, but use them she must; and after discoursing, often with dignity and delicacy, to me, she would move away on her ‘souliers de silence,’ and glide ghost-like through the house, watching and spying everywhere” (81).

As we can see here, Madame Beck’s surveillance of her school in order to keep it in order is enacted in several key ways— in prying into the private lives and letters of those in her

institution, Madame exerts control over her subjects' interior lives, leaving no material spaces out of the reach of her power; in "discoursing... with dignity," she reifies the "morality" of her system of management through rhetoric that allows her to shirk the responsibility of this control all the while maintaining it; and, in gliding away ghost-like on her shoes of silence, Madame's surveilling eye becomes a haunting and "normalizing" force that requires constant adherence to behavioral norms through its unperceivable, panoptic ubiquity.

At first, Lucy accepts Madame Beck's system, citing the same "moral management" that resulted from the Lunacy Act— how much more moral and "civilized" it is to enact disciplinary force through surveillance over physical restraint. Lucy says, "I liked madame for her capital sense, whatever I might think of her principles: as to her system, it did me no harm" (131). As long as she believes the system does her "no harm," precisely because she believes Madame's surveillance comes from a standpoint of moral principle with no overt insidious violence, then Lucy is willing to accept this system of power in order to obtain the subjectivity and shelter the institution offers. And importantly, it is Lucy's willingness to play the *role* of subject to Madame's disciplinary power that grants Madame's system credence, as Lucy is fully aware of every attempt at surveillance Madame enacts, indeed watching her riffle through her drawers "with a secret glee," declaring that, "The searcher might have turned and caught me; there would have been nothing for it then but a scene, and she and I would have had to come all at once, with a sudden clash, to a thorough knowledge of each other: down would have gone conventionalities, away— swept disguises, and *I* should have looked into her eyes, and *she* into mine" (131). This moment foreshadows the one in which Lucy meets the eyes of the ghost nun, but in fact Lucy does not meet Madame's eyes and there is no moment of mutual recognition and connection for her in *this* material world— rather, Lucy exposes the failure of Madame's surveillance in erasing

its own hand through her rational awareness of it— the surveillance, in Lucy’s words, “a mere network reticulated with holes” (494). At the same time, this passage makes it clear that, so long as the system is not directly confronted and challenged, the “conventionalities” of the bourgeois order are upheld, and this system is perpetuated through the “disguises” and roles that Madame and Lucy agree to take on. The “family model” of the asylum similarly relied on such adherence to role-play and disguise, and in order to maintain her positionality within the institution, Lucy must adhere to her expected role, thus normalizing and legitimating institutional surveillance.

Lucy’s legitimation of Madame’s social control extends to self-policing her own behavior. Upon receiving her first letter from her love interest Dr. John, Lucy hides in the garret of the Rue Fossette, where “none would follow [her]— none interrupt— not Madame herself,” and it is at this moment that Lucy, upon opening the letter, first witnesses the ghost nun, runs out of the garret, and does the following: “By instinct I shunned the refectory, and shaped my course to Madame’s sitting-room: I burst in. I said— ‘There is something in the grenier: I have been there: I saw something. Go and look at it, all of you!’” (272-273). In this moment, Lucy is practicing “moral management”— after attempting to carve out her own private interior space by taking her letter to the heterotopic margins of institutional control, and through this aberrant behavior nearly losing herself to the “spectral illusions” that arise as a result of this slippage in self-control, she reports the incident to the headmistress of the school, “by instinct” heading to Madame’s chamber, and inviting her to “go and look”— to go and reinstate her power of surveillance over the garret space, and thus, Lucy’s interiority.

But, important to understanding this scene is a missing key part of both how madness was perceived in the nineteenth century and how *Villette* represents Lucy’s sense of being queer in a too-ordered world: and that is the intersection of sexuality. As Showalter notes, “The nun

appears whenever Lucy is struggling to keep her sexual desires in check, and represents the cloistered celibacy her life is coming to resemble” (70). As noted earlier, the legendary nun of the Rue Fossette was buried alive for “some sin against her vow,” coded language that is almost certainly alluding to some act of sexual aberrance on the part of the nun; so when the nun haunts Lucy, she is not only representing Lucy’s anxieties of slipping into madness, she is also representing the consequences of straying away from the sexual norms<sup>23</sup>— of living a queer existence. And indeed, Lucy’s sojourn to the garret of the Rue Fossette was to the purpose of indulging in her unacceptable erotic fantasies. When Lucy first catches Madame Beck enacting her surveillance over Lucy’s private items, she believes she will be free from the harm of Madame’s control because, “Loverless and inexpectant of love, I was as safe from spies in my heart-poverty, as the beggar from thieves in his destitution of purse” (131). Implied here from the start is that one of Madame’s main concerns in enacting her power of surveillance is in rooting out sexual behaviors that run counter to the order and abstinence her institution requires (for, to give in to erotic fantasy is to lack willpower and self-control, to fail in the management of morals). And it is only when Lucy gains a love interest that she then becomes concerned of Madame’s prying eyes, taking her letter to the garret so that, in her own erotic representation of the event: “I took my letter, trembling with sweet impatience; I broke its seal. Will it be long— will it be short? thought I... It was long” (272). It is after Lucy *breaks the seal* of her *long* letter, and after gorging on the ecstasy it brought— “This present moment had no pain, no blot, no want; full, pure, perfect, it deeply blessed me”— that Lucy sees the ghost nun: “Say what you

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick O’Malley in *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* writes that nuns were particularly emblematic of queer deviance from gender and sexual norms to the Victorians: “Adultery, celibacy, mannishness, cross-dressing, [...] the self-immolation of the convent, the sexless marriage. All of these violations of normative gender and sexual roles... surround the figures... of nuns” (2). There were particular fears that the nuns could “escape the convent walls... and bring their alien creed and their peculiar erotics to the heart of England” (3).

will, reader— tell me that I was nervous, or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that letter; declare that I dreamed: this I vow— I saw there— in that room— on that night— an image like— a NUN” (273). Lucy almost defensively preempts the reaction of her normative readers, flippantly telling them to label her “mad” or to say the erotic “excitement” of the letter is what produced the vision of the ghost nun; but rather than accept these labels and explanations, Lucy declares that she saw the nun, and in doing so, reaffirms her own perception and mad sense as a material reality.

Significant here too is the proximity of sexuality to madness, both given as potential causes for the ghost sighting. And indeed, in the nineteenth century, the inability to control one’s sexual impulses was seen as one of the major contributors to madness and mental aberration. One type of partial insanity described at the time, known as “erotic monomania” or “erotomania,” was described by psychologist Jean Esquirol in the year 1845 as “not a disease; it is melancholy. Erotomania ... is a chronic cerebral affection, and is characterized by an excessive sexual passion,” writing that the erotomaniac typically would “neglect, abandon, and then fly both their relatives and friends. They disdain fortune, and *despising social customs*, are capable of the most extraordinary, difficult, painful and strange actions” (Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth 258-259; emphasis added). Ultimately, this is what links madness and queerness in the Victorian consciousness: both signify a despising of social customs, an unwillingness to “behave” correctly, and this linkage is also the lasting legacy of the Victorian asylum. As Foucault writes in *Madness*, by the Victorian age “madness belonged to social failure,” and the function of the asylum was to “exclude... those whose transgressions risk compromising the social order” (259; 269). It is this sense of her own “social failure” that Lucy comes to reckon with throughout *Villette*, and it is Madame’s surveillance tactics that attempt to prevent Lucy

from “compromising the social order” with her mad perceptions, spectral illusions, and erotomania.

In the Victorian age, to be mad was to be queer, and to be queer was to be mad. The history of madness itself has always linked sexual deviancy to unreason, as Foucault notes, “the classical period had confined... an abstract unreason which mingled madmen and libertines, invalids, and criminals” (209). And, as Huffer writes, “if madness marks the threshold that separates reason from its own potential error, delirium, or passion, sexuality sits on that threshold,” a “bringing together of sins of the flesh with infractions against reason” (60). As mental illness and sexuality become increasingly medicalized over the course of the nineteenth century, “the modern medical subject” comes to face “a different kind of moral control with the psychiatric depositing of guilt and shame into the heart of his inner life: an alienated, monstrous sexuality” (Huffer 72). In other words, queerness becomes the hinge upon which madness swings in the Victorian age. The doctrine of “moral management” was very much about the management of the body—the management of one’s passions, desires, impulses, in order to adhere to some “rational” norm—and to neglect that management and self-control was to be at once queer and mad. In the next section I will further show how thoroughly entwined madness and queerness are for Lucy in *Villette*, and will argue that Lucy’s madness is a direct result of her queer (dis)orientation with the social order whose regulation of her body/mind and material spaces she refuses to adhere to.

### *Mad Senses and Queer (Dis)orientation*



Lucy's strangeness has been highlighted by readers of *Villette* since its publication,<sup>24</sup> and literary critics in recent decades have become particularly affixed with articulating what makes Lucy especially *queer*. Some critics locate Lucy's queerness in her apparent unwillingness to conform to normative gender roles,<sup>25</sup> while others denote her deviation from heteronormative social structures and sexualities.<sup>26</sup> But what is lacking here is a framework that allows us to understand how Lucy's queerness intersects with her madness as a way of being within a social world. In fact, I argue that Lucy's queerness is more capacious than any of these critics indicate— that, indeed, Lucy's queerness does not inhere in any one act or thing, but is instead the product of being *disoriented* within the social and material world around her. In other words, Lucy's behaviors and desires are *queer* because she feels out of place in the gendered and eroticized social *structures* of normative bourgeois society, and as a result, is skeptical of the very *order* of all bodies and things. Additionally, I argue that Lucy's much noted neuroticism,

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<sup>24</sup> Contemporary responses to *Villette* were often critical of Lucy's character in ways that marked her as deviant from normative Victorian expectations. William Thackeray considered the novel "rather vulgar," saying that he doesn't think "*good women*" should "fall in love with two men at once." Matthew Arnold considered the novel "disagreeable" "because the writer's mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage," for which Lucy becomes the vessel; and, the publication *The Spectator* wrote that "Lucy Snowe took a savage delight in refusing to be comforted, in a position of indeed isolation and hardship" (Cooper xxii). These responses to *Villette* already mark Lucy as out of place— someone who is vulgar, not a "good woman," possessed by hunger and rage, and indeed, taking a "savage delight" in the loneliness she experiences as a result of her out-of-placeness with the world.

<sup>25</sup> As noted in a previous footnote, Sharon Marcus identifies Lucy as an antithesis to normative ideals of feminine friendship, but additionally, in "The Suggestive Spectacle," Patricia Duncker keys in on the moment when, cast to the play the role of a man in the all-women boarding school's play, Lucy takes to the stage "dressed as a man from the waist up, but as a woman from the waist down," which Duncker argues emphasizes the "gender-bending" nature of the novel (67).

<sup>26</sup> Lucy appears critical of the heteronormative family structure. This is something that Ann Weinstone notes in "The Queerness of Lucy Snowe," writing that Lucy is queer because she is driven to "decenter heterosexual union and its implied construction of family as the locus of both personal and narrative fulfillment" (367). Other critics as well have noted Lucy's sexual non-normativity. Beverly Forsyth in "The Two Faces of Lucy Snowe" argues that "*Villette* is a revealing glimpse into social and sexual deviancies subtly interwoven throughout the text that create a subtext of repressed sexuality, voyeurism, and sadomasochistic behavior" (17). Lucy's "sadomasochistic" tendencies become the focus of Forsyth's analysis.

melancholia, and madness are a result of her disorientations with the social world— that, by questioning the order of things, Lucy questions the fabric of material reality itself— producing spectral visions, feelings of being non-substantive, and a particularly queer loneliness. Lucy perceives the world and moves through it differently from those around her, and as such, she feels out of line with the social bodies and material objects that constitute knowable reality. It is because of this disorientation that Lucy must negotiate reality and unreality, embodiment and disembodiment, materiality and immateriality; and in doing so, Lucy’s “madness” emerges as a *queer (dis)orientation* to an uncannily straight and ordered world.

Lucy’s disorientation begins at home— or, more accurately, her deviance from the normative order of things begins with homelessness. If the domestic home in the Victorian world is supposed to be the locus of comfort and stability, an asylum where chaos dissipates and madness is reigned in, then Lucy Snowe sees straight through the façade. In “Repression, Transgression, and the Erotics of ‘Heretic Narrative,’” Joseph Allen Boone outlines Lucy’s movement *away* from “home.” Boone notes that Lucy is never given parents or an origin story, and writes that “this radical lack of narrative origins, of an ‘original’ home, inaugurates Lucy’s quest into the unknown, a journey for which there is... no prospect of a happy return to stasis: temporally, spatially, and psychologically” (48). Boone calls Lucy a “placeless person” and suggests the novel performs a “radical placelessness” that “traces a trajectory whose direction repeatedly swerves out of the reader’s grasp, frustrating one’s ability to pinpoint its present location or predict its evolution and outcome” (48). What is intriguing in Boone’s analysis is how Lucy’s displacement from home has a disorienting effect on the reader. Indeed, the disorienting structure of Lucy’s narrative, which itself is a product of Lucy’s disorientation with the bourgeois home, is itself maddening. In this section, I will chart Lucy’s multiple

disorientations and will move towards a consideration of how these disorientations produce a madness that Lucy, despite being lonely in her queerness, does not experience alone; as in fact, this “madness” is one she makes the reader share with her through the slipperiness of her first-person narrative.

But first, what does it mean to be disoriented? In speaking of Lucy’s disorientations with the normative order of things, I am drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology*. Ahmed writes that “being orientated” has to do with the way bodies and things take up time and space in relationship to each other. She writes that, “When we are orientated, we might not even notice we are orientated... When we experience disorientation, we might notice orientation as something we do not have” (5-6). For Ahmed, “Orientation involves aligning body and space,” and it is this alignment that determines “how we come to ‘feel at home’” (7). Disorientation, then, is what occurs when the alignment between body and space fails— when spaces fail to feel “familiar,” when our bodies do not comfortably align with the spaces we inhabit, when we do not “feel at home,” that is disorientation. And for Ahmed, the promise of disorientation is this: “risking departure from the straight and narrow makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, and even becoming queer” (21).

Lucy certainly risks this departure from the straight and narrow ordering of things, and in doing so, she indeed gets lost, becomes queer, and as I will show, becomes “mad.” Lucy’s disorientation stems from the placelessness that Boone notes— her inability to “feel at home” with bourgeois norms of domesticity, femininity, and sexuality. The first indication that Lucy is critical of bourgeois norms comes in the character Polly. At the beginning of the novel, Polly is a child, daughter of the almost-too-aptly-named Mr. Home. Polly is meant to be representative of a normative domestic femininity as defined by a submissive subservience to men. When Mr.

Home drops off Polly at the Bretton household for a visit, she clings to her father, imploring him not to leave. Lucy narrates: “[Mr. Home] laid his hand on the child’s uplifted head. [Polly] said— ‘Kiss Polly.’ He kissed her. I wished she would utter some hysterical cry, so that I might get relief and be at ease. She made wonderfully little noise: she seemed to have got what she wanted— *all* she wanted, and to be in a trance of content” (17; emphasis in original). As important as the interaction between Polly and Mr. Home here is Lucy’s reaction to it. Polly’s desire for her father, who is representative of the heterosexual, patriarchal ordering of the “home” itself, is discomfiting for Lucy. In this passage, Lucy is not “at ease” with the intimacy between Polly and Mr. Home, and Lucy’s narration eroticizes this interaction, as she describes the kiss from Mr. Home as being *all* that Polly wanted, putting her in a trance. Rather than witness this typical, loving interaction between a father and child in tranquility, Lucy wishes for a “hysterical cry” that would disrupt the veneer of domestic peace. Whereas Polly is orientated towards the normative bourgeois domestic, and is thus able to “feel at home,” in a “trance of content,” within the gendered and sexualized space the home constructs, Lucy is disoriented, and as a result, Polly’s adherence to feminine, heterosexual norms becomes strange to her.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed writes that “If the sexual involves the contingency of bodies coming into contact with other bodies, then sexual disorientation slides quickly into social disorientation, *as a disorientation in how things are arranged*. The effects are indeed uncanny: what is familiar, what is passed over in the veil of its familiarity, becomes rather strange” (162; emphasis in original). In the above scene, the eroticized contact between Mr. Home and Polly becomes strange to Lucy *because* of her disorientation with the ordering of the social world around her. For other narrators, the kiss from Mr. Home would be familiar— a simple kiss goodbye for an affectionate daughter. But, for Lucy, disoriented within heteronormativity and its

social structures, the scene indeed becomes “rather strange,” so much so that Lucy would feel at ease if Polly hurled a “hysterical cry” that could disrupt this social ordering and rip away the “veil of familiarity.”

Without Mr. Home around, Polly becomes despondent, as, without a patriarchal figure to devote her attentions to, Polly herself is aimless, disoriented, in fact, not “at home.” Lucy narrates:

She was far from disobedient; but an object less conducive to comfort... it was scarcely possible to have before one’s eyes. She moped: no grown person could have performed that uncheering business better; no furrowed face of adult exile... ever bore more legibly the signs of homesickness than did her infant visage. She seemed growing old and unearthly... whenever, opening a room-door, I found her seated in a corner alone, her head in her pigmy hand, that room seemed to me not inhabited, but haunted (15).

Polly becomes an example here of how disorientation is not inherently queer. Whereas Polly’s disorientation here is produced as a “homesickness,” or, a longing to return to the normative ordering of things, Lucy’s disorientations are produced through her inability to *fit* within the spaces constructed by those norms. Polly’s melancholia and “adult exile” here foreshadow Lucy’s own melancholic exile to Vilette later in the narrative, as she struggles to “feel at home” in any of the normative bourgeois social structures available to her, both in England and abroad (itself a border between the “normative” and the “Other” that will become eroded by the narrative). Whereas Polly’s disorientation inheres in a longing to return to home (quite literally, to Mr. Home), Lucy has no “home” to sickly long for; instead, Lucy’s disorientation inheres in a longing to “feel at home” in a world she’s never felt at home with.

The effects are indeed uncanny. Polly's emotional codependence on Mr. Home is so strange to Lucy that Polly becomes nothing more than a discomfiting "object" that "haunts" the rooms of the Bretton household. Polly's discomfiting performance of normative Victorian womanhood causes Lucy to question her own sense of reality. "I scarcely know what thoughts I had," Lucy says upon seeing Polly praying in her bed, "but they ran the risk of being hardly more rational and healthy than that child's mind must have been" (15). The presence of the uncanny Polly produces a bevy of illegible, unhealthy thoughts for Lucy to the point of being *maddening*, for her presence highlights a key contradiction: is Polly strange for her attachment to the masculine bourgeois Home, or is Lucy herself strange (or even queer) for finding Polly's feelings unconscionable? Lucy goes on to ascribe Polly as having a "monomaniac tendency" (15), and we might very well conclude that in doing so, Lucy projects a diagnosis of madness onto Polly as a way of distancing herself from her own disorientation. She cannot understand why Polly chooses to behave the way she behaves, and she can scarcely rationalize how these behaviors appear normal to everyone else around her. In this moment of being disoriented by Polly, Lucy questions the supposed rationality of the heteronormative social structure, and in doing so, the materiality and rationality of the external world becomes suspect, leading Lucy to feel haunted by the uncanny strangeness of normative bodies and things— haunted by the queer materiality of her own perceptions.

Additionally of interest here is that, though Lucy hints at her own mental unhealthiness in the presence of the uncanny normative, she also hints at the mental unwellness of Polly's disposition, as she compares her own illegible thoughts to "that child's mind" (15). Suggested here is something key: that, while Lucy's madness will later become legible to the normative society around her (being diagnosed with "spectral illusions" by Dr. John), what Lucy identifies

as Polly's "madness" will go unregistered because Polly is still orientated towards the normative. Though Polly's emotional codependence on her father in fact produces a melancholia, she will not be diagnosed as being mad by anyone except Lucy, as Polly's bodily behaviors *fit* within the space of bourgeois heteropatriarchy, and thus, can pass by unnoticed through a "veil of familiarity" (Ahmed 162). In contrast, Lucy's emotional turmoil throughout the text, produced by her disorientations, becomes evidence of her "madness," as she has no socially-sanctioned framework through which she can rationalize her non-normative desires, thoughts, and feelings. With no reflection of herself available in the normative ordering of things, Lucy has no other recourse but to disavow the ordering of reality itself, and as such, she is inevitably deemed "mad" for trusting her own perceptions, her own mad senses, more than others.

Polly is far from the only "haunting object" that Lucy encounters through her disorientations. In fact, as the novel progresses, things become only more strange and unreal, as Lucy's prolonged feelings of homelessness, exile, and loneliness heighten her sense of disorientation with the normative space around her, thrusting her further into madness. At one point, in a heightened depressive episode, haunted by her inability to adhere to the social order, Lucy leaves the Rue Fossette, confesses<sup>27</sup> her sins and transgressions at the Catholic Church, and passes out. Upon waking up, she ruminates, "I sat up appalled, wondering into what region, amongst what strange beings I was waking. At first I knew nothing I looked on: a wall was not a

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<sup>27</sup> In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault famously identifies the "confessional" as the central historical mechanism through which sexuality becomes a truth of the self that can be "driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body" (59). In the confessional scene, Lucy becomes subject to this surveilling power: "the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused— had done me good," Lucy declares, "I was already solaced" (179). What is occurring in this scene is what Foucault so succinctly sums up when he writes, "Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence" (60). Lucy is "solaced" by the expression of her queer desires, but ultimately, she is "reduced to silence" by power— Lucy's confession "could not be again diffused," not even to her readers; instead, she intentionally withholds information, and silences herself, for, as Foucault notes, "the obligation to conceal [sex] was but another aspect of the duty to admit to it" (61).

wall— a lamp not a lamp. I should have understood what we call a ghost as well as I did the commonest object; which is another way of intimating that all my eye rested on struck it as spectral” (185). She then sees herself in the mirror, saying “I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face. It was obvious, not only from the furniture, but from the position of the windows, doors, and fireplace, that this was an unknown room in an unknown house” (186). She continues on, thinking that the “furniture could not be real... they must be ghosts of such; or, if this were denied as too wild an hypothesis— and, confounded as I was, I *did* deny it— there remained but to conclude that I had passed myself into an abnormal state of mind” (189). This is a key moment of disorientation for Lucy, for after passing out in a fit of madness, she awakes into a too-ordered world that seems but a spectral imitation of the one she knew prior to the mental breakdown, indeed her own body seeming freakish to her eye.

Lucy’s loneliness, due in large part to her inability to fit within the normative order of bourgeois social arrangements, drives her here to an ultimatum: she can either posit that the orderings of bodies and things around her are strange, nothing but “ghosts” of what a rational reality would look like; or, otherwise, she is mad. And, though she initially asserts that she was “in [her] sane mind,” she eventually determines that she has passed into “an abnormal state of mind,” as it is easier for her to accept that *she* is out of line than it is to consider the implications of reality being an uncannily straight, ordered world. It is quite literally the *order of things* that drives her to madness— to questioning the stability of the material world and to sensing (madly) the queer materiality of her own perceptions. In fact, it is the material space itself that appears strange to Lucy, as it is “the position of the windows, doors, and fireplace” that indicate to her that she has awoken into the unknown. It is a moment that recalls the “moral architecture” of the



Victorian asylum, wherein the asylum attempted to promote “normal” behaviors and rationality through a meticulously ordered control of space and furniture in order to produce an imitative façade of the bourgeois “home.”

How ironic it is then that Lucy has awoken in the house of Bretton— or, at least, a imitative replica of it, as Mrs. Bretton and her family moved to Villette, taking their furniture with them (a disorientating collapse of domestic with foreign, “normative” with “Other”). “Why did Bretton... haunt me thus?” asks Lucy Snowe (189). And, when Mrs. Bretton enters the room (not recognizing that the personage she’s housing is her Goddaughter Lucy), Lucy asks her “Madam where am I?” to which Mrs. Bretton ironically replies, “In a very safe asylum.” Lucy rejoins, “I am so entirely bewildered, I do not know whether I can trust my senses at all” (192). In a twist of fate, in what should be a comforting return to the closest thing to “home” that Lucy has had in her life, her disorientation accelerates, as the return of the bourgeois home, the uncanny “homishness” of the “asylum” she finds herself in, and its normative heteropatriarchal ordering, only haunts Lucy more, causing her to question her own perceptions and the reality of her own body. “A very safe asylum” the domestic home is supposed to be, and in fact it is this belief in the safety of the “home” that makes it a suitable model for the doctrine of “moral architecture” in the Victorian era; but, for the “maddened” Lucy, it is merely a confirmation of her own delirium— of her own placelessness and inability to fit within normative social structures— and the utter ineffectiveness of “domestication” in policing the boundaries between the mad and the sane, the queer and the normal.

But, Lucy has left a breadcrumb for us here, as well. Importantly, she has hinted that, “confounded as [she] was,” she accepted that her state of mind was abnormal, rather than accepting that the very order of things are “ghostly” in their uncanny strangeness. Her emphasis

that she “*did* deny it”— “it” here being the idea that the order of things are strange— *because* she was “confounded,” suggests that, in retrospect, she feels she should have trusted her own mad senses. Though at the time Lucy felt she must not have been in her right mind, her earlier declaration that she “was in [her] sane mind” coupled with this suggestion of being “confounded,” indicates that, at the time she is writing her narrative, she believes herself “sane,” and finds it more likely that the world has gone “mad” than she has. And indeed, by the end of the novel, this is the case. After enduring a prolonged disorientation with the social and material world around her, Lucy becomes reorientated through accepting her own mad perceptions of reality to be, in fact, material; and, this reorientation emerges as a *queer (dis)orientation*, in that Lucy’s trust in her own mad senses allows her to realign with the normative order of spaces, bodies, and things on her own queer terms. We have seen a sample of this in the scene analyzed in the introduction of this chapter— in reshaping her material worlds, in containing her griefs and desires in spaces adjacent to the normative order, Lucy is able to carve out spaces for her mad interiority that allow her to exist queerly and materially within the strictures of the social world.

By the end of the novel, Lucy’s disorientation with the world around her culminates in her escape from the Rue Fossette after Madame attempts to subdue Lucy’s nerves by drugging her with opium, but the drug only agitates Lucy further.<sup>28</sup> Ghostly is the very façade of the boarding school on the night Lucy slips out of the school’s gates, high on opium and entering a dream-like space, writing “Ghostly deep as is the stillness of this convent, it is only eleven” after which she “wonder[s] at the strange ease with which this prison has been forced. It seems as if I

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<sup>28</sup> According to Janet Oppenheim, during the Victorian period, “Opium was... a widely recognized narcotic, as generously and irresponsibly prescribed to calm agitated nerves as tranquillizers are today,” yet was also “believed to act as [a] stimulant” (114).

had been pioneered invisibly, as if some dissolving force had gone before me; for myself, I have scarce made an effort” (498). Indeed, strange and ghostly are the very objects and environment that Lucy finds herself moving almost effortlessly through. But, the “scarce effort” that Lucy makes on her part is *not* an indication that she “fits” into this uncannily ordered world, but it is precisely the opposite— that, in existing adjacent to the normative, Lucy is able to slip past and through the straight order that attempts to contain her. If, indeed, as Sara Ahmed notes, “Disorientation involves contact with things, but a contact in which ‘things’ slip as a proximity that does not hold things in place,” (166), then Lucy’s ease of movement out of the boarding school she deems both a “prison” and a “convent” is precisely this slippage that Ahmed notes is a key part of disorientation. Unconfined, unorderable, Lucy is able to move invisibly and shadow-like through and across the very architecture that is meant to order bodies and things in a straight and normative fashion.

This movement across normative time and space is a part of Lucy’s queer orientation toward the world. In fact, in being disoriented, and in questioning the very reality of things, Lucy performs acts of queer survival that allow her to take up “madness” as a queer orientation. The way Lucy moves invisibly and shadow-like across Villetta is something that Boone indicates is “itself a disguise...that allows Lucy to ‘pass’— queer subject that she is” (45). Lucy’s own “ghostliness” is indeed a disguise from the normative ordering of things— as, moving ghost-like and unnoticed through the Villetta park, Lucy discovers her Godmother Bretton, Dr. John, and Mr. Home, and attempts to avoid their notice. Upon thinking that Dr. John has spotted her, Lucy waves him away, writing that “had he persisted, he would have seen the spectacle of Lucy incensed,” and that she would no longer be “quite tame, or absolutely inoffensive and shadow-like” (504-505). Lucy “passes” through this normative space only to encounter her past— the

familiar domestic family that has haunted her because of her exclusion from its ordering returns yet again, and in too close proximity. The effect is disorienting for Lucy, but instead of allowing Dr. John to engage with her, she rebuffs him, asserting her own desire to bask in the pleasure of her queer loneliness, and threatening to erupt into a spectacle of “mad freakery.”

This becomes Lucy’s queer (dis)orientation— she not only trusts her own perceptions by the novel’s end, she also takes a queer pleasure in her exclusions from the normative ordering of bodies and things. Nowhere is this clearer than her final confrontation with the nun, in which Lucy takes a rapturous pleasure in tearing to shreds and fragments the monstrous body that represents both the “madness” of Lucy’s perceptions and the normative order of gender and sexuality. Upon returning to her bedchamber after her opium trip, Lucy discovers “stretched on [her] bed the old phantom— the NUN.” What follows is nothing short of a scene of queer erotics bending the binary of pleasure and pain:

Tempered by late incidents, my nerves disdained hysteria. Warm from illuminations, and music, and thronging thousands, thoroughly lashed up by a new scourge, I defied spectra. In a moment, without exclamation, I had rushed on the haunted couch; nothing leaped out, or sprung; all the movement was mine, so was all the life, the reality, the substance, the force; as my instinct felt. I tore her up— the incubus! I held her on high— the goblin! I shook her loose— the mystery! And down she fell— down all around me— down in shreds and fragments— and I trode upon her. (519).

In her melancholic mania, Lucy takes the dominant position over the nun in her own bed, relishing in the pain she perceives herself inflicting upon the nun. Finally, in this real and unreal present moment of tactile erotic contact with the haunting nun, the truth is revealed— the “nun”

in the bed is merely nun's apparel<sup>29</sup> stuffed with pillows, and a note attached to the head-band reads "The nun of the attic bequeaths to Lucy Snowe her wardrobe. She will be seen...no more" (519). In the end, left with the nun's apparel as evidence of the materiality of her mad senses and perceptions, Lucy's queer orientation inheres in an unrestrained, maniacal pleasure in taking seriously the "spectral illusions" she is visited by, literally proving their (queer) materiality by relying on the sensation of touch.

Lucy's perception of the world around her is "mad" because it reveals the strangeness of *not* being queer: the deep, uncanny strangeness of adhering to the normative ordering of bodies and objects. Whether or not Lucy hallucinates the spectral things she sees and hears in the end is inconsequential; what is essential to understand is that Lucy's world *feels* like a hallucination because the normative ordering of things *should* cause us to question whether or not reality makes *sense*. Indeed, *Villette* is an act of making (mad) sense— disoriented by the way things are, Lucy must rely on her own senses, rather than anyone else's, in order to create a space for pleasure in her own existence. In the end, Lucy Snowe is deemed "mad" for trusting her own queer perceptions of reality rather than internalizing the codes and ways of being and seeing that others expect her to.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault writes that by the end of the eighteenth-century madness became "situated in those distances man takes in regard to himself, to his world... madness became possible in that milieu where man's relations with his feelings, with time, with others, are altered" (220). This is the trajectory that Lucy's relationship to madness takes— in being outside the order of things, Lucy's world becomes made up of queer materiality, as it is the instability of her own feelings, her disorienting relationship to time and place, and the tenuous

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<sup>29</sup> To the Victorians, the fact that ghosts wore clothes became evidence that they arose from within the mind (McCorristine 45).

and intense connections she has with those around her that produce the psychic pain and “spectral illusions” of her mental aberrance. This last point is important to underscore— at the core of this theoretical discussion around Lucy’s queer madness is the material psychic pain and emotional distress she undergoes throughout the novel— a pain and trauma that is the direct result of her queer loneliness. This chapter will conclude with a consideration of this mad queer pain, its importance in understanding Lucy’s actions throughout the novel, and how lingering in the haunts of these bad feelings can actually open up space for queer histories and further possibilities.

*Conclusion: Bad Feelings, Queer Histories, and Further Possibilities*

After being diagnosed with a case of “spectral illusions,” Lucy asks Dr. John if there is a cure, and he responds, “Happiness is the cure— a cheerful mind the preventative: cultivate both.” Lucy is dissatisfied with this professional advice, and she famously replies, “No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to *cultivate* happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure” (278). Lucy is here satirizing the doctrine of “moral management,” making a mockery of the idea that one could simply choose to *not* be mad or melancholy through self-control; and, she is also making a salient point about queer pain and the freedom to feel bad feelings. Ahmed writes in *The Promise of Happiness* that “happiness” as a social affect has its own orienting effects<sup>30</sup>— when you deviate from the sanctioned behaviors and desires of the normative order, you are threatened with unhappiness: “The unhappiness of the deviant has a powerful function as a

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<sup>30</sup> A historical note from Foucault in *Madness*: “if happiness in the eighteenth century is part of the order of nature and reason, unhappiness, or at least whatever deters from happiness without reason, must be part of another order” (213).

perverse promise (if you do this, you will get that!), as a promise that is simultaneously a threat (so don't do that!)" (91). Ahmed calls for a queer freedom—the freedom to be unhappy: "The freedom to be unhappy is not about being wretched or sad, although it might involve freedom to express such feelings. The freedom to be unhappy would be the freedom to be affected by what is unhappy, and to live a life that might affect others unhappily" (195). In this rebuttal to Dr. John's prescription, Lucy is asserting that freedom.

While Heather Love in *Feeling Backward* understands the trepidation around centering bad feelings in queer experience, not wanting to "naturalize" the link between queerness and melancholia, she argues that it is important not to deny their existence,<sup>31</sup> for in fact, "it is the damaging aspects of the past that tend to stay with us, and the desire to forget may itself be a symptom of haunting" (20; 1). She argues that queerness has "a long history of association with failure, impossibility, and loss," calling "the art of losing... a particularly queer art" (21; 24). And yet, it is for this very reason that examining the bad feelings of queerness can be an important endeavor, as they "serve as an index to the ruined state of the social world" (27). To be haunted by bad feelings is to discover how and why the social world is a failure—to discover why it is that "failure, impossibility, and loss" has been the experience of queer existence time and time again. When queer life is haunted by its traumas and its ghosts, it is also an opportunity to remember that "the ghost cannot be simply tracked back to an individual loss or trauma," that the ghost signals a "complicated sociality" that involves a mediation "between institution and

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<sup>31</sup>Grieving and the outward expression of intense emotions can be its own form of queer, mad resistance too. In "Breaking Open the Bone," Jennifer Poole and Jennifer Ward write that "In many Western spaces, good grief is quiet, tame, dry, and controlled. It does not make a scene... Good grief is gendered, staged, linear, white, and bound by the family, or the community. It is graceful and always grateful for expert intervention." Meanwhile, mad grief is "a resistance practice that allows, speaks, names... the subjugated sense of loss that comes to us all." Mad grief is "not about how to... 'get over' pain and loss, but how to... feel it" (95).

person” (Gordon 183; 142). To be haunted by the bad feelings— to have “a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had” (Gordon 183)— is to remove the stigma of shame from the individual, and to notice the violent and repressive structures that produce complicated traumas and failed sociality.

Lucy Snowe’s story is one of loss. It is her loss of home, her loss of love, and her loss of freedom that color her narrative. But precisely what it is that haunts her most is obscured— Lucy never gives us a clear history of her origins and her real history. The one moment she lets the reader see a glimpse of her past, she describes it in these allegorical terms:

[I]t cannot be concealed that[...] I must have fallen overboard, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time— a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat[...] I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day[...] a heavy tempest lay on us ; all hope that we should be saved was taken away.

In fine, the ship was lost, and the crew perished (39).

Lucy refers in obfuscated rhetoric some all-too-rememberable trauma from her past, metaphorizing it as a shipwreck in the storm, with the sensations of drowning haunting her subconscious. It is moments like these and other dream-like sequences throughout *Villette*, particularly the opium trip section, that make it feel like Lucy is lingering in, indeed haunting and haunted by, a spectral “traumascape.” Jessica Gross writes that a “traumascape” is “a bizarre, surrealistic milieu that represents how the world seems to the traumatized,” a space that depicts “a disorientation of time, space, and language” (218-219). In other words, trauma reshapes the very landscape around us, and makes the world a disorienting place to exist in. It is for this reason, as Beth Filson writes in “The Haunting Can End,” that “trauma matters. It shapes



us. It happens all around us” (20). Filson further writes that, “Those of us who have been haunted know that the ghosts we walk with do not just represent events we may want to forget, but *also* our personal histories. What I know of my own experience is that I cannot separate trauma from the landscape of my youth, from the history of my family” (24). This is the importance of the trauma and the bad feelings— it connects us to time and place— to the traumascapes we move through and the histories we are haunted by. Lucy’s trauma makes it difficult for her to detail her own origin and personal history in terms that aren’t inherently disorienting, but it is also her trauma that allows her to make contact with the ghost nun, and to share the same time and space as this queer figure from the Middle Ages whom Lucy finds some sort of connection with.

In *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman argues that the weight of history binds people to each other across the fabric of time. She writes, “people are bound to one another, engrouped, made to feel coherently collective, through particular orchestrations of time,” (3). One such group becomes queers— those who across space and time have deviated from the gender and sexual norms of their society. Freeman writes that “history appears as damaged time” (7). It is thus the temporal rupturing of trauma and traumascapes that can bind queers to each other across history. It is this historical trauma, this shared pain of queerness, that connect Lucy and the ghost nun despite their temporal disjunctions. In being haunted by the past— by both her own and that of the ghost nun and the other queers before her— Lucy is finding material human connection that she otherwise wouldn’t have in the damaged sociality of her present moment. After all, as Freeman says, the “stubborn lingering of pastness... is a hallmark of queer affect” (8). Lucy’s lingering in the past, her lingering in the bad feelings and the trauma, enable her to reorient herself within a queer history, to find a melancholy comradeship in the loneliness of her situation, and to bind the wounds that time and loss have left on her psyche.

This queer connection across space and time is important not only for how it reorients the queer subject within the past and the present, but also the future, as Jack Halberstam writes in *In a Queer Time and Place*, “queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience— namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2). Indeed, Lucy’s life exists entirely outside of these temporal markers of a “normal” life. We get no sense of her birth family, she spends a lot of the novel worrying about becoming a celibate spinster, and though she has a fascination with mortality, she is still alive by the novel’s end. Instead, the melancholic ending of the novel offers the same watery traumascapes of loss and the irreparable damage and lasting power of institutional violence, but it also points towards new future possibilities.

Lucy’s lover and fiancé embarks for sea and does not return, being caught in a storm that “roared... for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks.” Lucy does not explicitly state her lover’s death, instead leaving the result of the storm open-ended, allowing her readers to “conceive the delight of joy born again out of great terror... Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life.” But Lucy will not picture this for us, instead allowing herself the freedom to be unhappy, the freedom to linger in the repetitions of her trauma, meanwhile “Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life” (546). It is an ending that perhaps on its face seems hopeless. The institutional power that oppressed her, surveilled and policed her interiority, and enforced her separation and isolation from those she loved, prevails unscathed. Yet, in the ghostly nature of the storm that leaves her lover stuck between materiality and immateriality, life and death, return and exile, Lucy is also opening up a space of hope and possibility— by this time, she has become the headmistress of her own school, and this new start to her life, though it

is suffused still with bad feeling and loss, provides Lucy with the opportunity to further shape her material world *and* the worlds of others, one that addresses and reckons with the traumas that haunt her, and one that could foster future connections with queer lives like hers. The queer materiality of the novel's ending allows Lucy the space for another new beginning, one that is deeply connected to queer history, and one that opens the door for a new type of life.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon writes that “the ghost is... pregnant with unfulfilled possibility” (183). *Villette* is haunted by many ghosts, and though their melancholy can be hard to hold and embrace, the ghosts also represent the *possibility* of a better future— one not without the trauma, not without the bad feeling, but one that offers a place and a time for queer existence.

## CONCLUSION

I wish now to demonstrate the usefulness of this thesis' cultural research and the applicability of the theory of queer materiality to Victorian texts outside of Brontë. In examining Ezra Jennings of *The Moonstone* (one of many queer, mad freaks in the novel— Rosanna Spearman and Limping Lucy are others), I will show the malleability that the theory of queer materiality has in addressing issues of the “freakish” in Victorian literature, as Ezra Jennings offers a model of queer materiality that isn't primarily ghostly or haunting; rather, Ezra creates queer material space that both destabilizes the normative order at the same time that he re-stabilizes the normative. What Ezra shows is that queer materiality isn't *only* a form of queer, mad resistance that materializes queer worlds— rather, the “mad freak” can stitch back together normative material worlds.

Ezra arrives in the novel as a character of peculiar appearance: “His gipsy-complexion, his fleshless cheeks, his gaunt facial bones, his dreamy eyes, his extraordinary parti-coloured hair, the puzzling contradiction between his face and figure which made him look old and young both together— were all more or less calculated to produce an unfavorable impression of him on a stranger's mind” (388). Clear here is that Ezra is a visual spectacle: a “freak” whose body/mind is full of contradiction and ambiguity, particularly with regard to his race. Like Bertha Mason, his racial make-up is hinted at but never distinctly labelled, and Ezra himself tells us: “I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother— we are straying away from our subject... The truth is, I have associations with these modest little hedgeside flowers— It doesn't matter” (391). Based on stereotypes of colonialist ideologies, and particularly the belief that indigenous people are “closer to nature” than the “civilized” white populace, Ezra's cryptic statement regarding his associations with the flowers

could be indicative of his indigeneity; but regardless, his exact lineage is left opaque, a “freakish” possibility left to the imagination of the spectating/reading audience.

Ezra, too, is a queer character whose gender and sexuality strays away from the normative. At one point Ezra declares, “Physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitutions— and I am one of them!” (393). Ezra develops intimate feelings for the handsome gentleman Franklin Blake. He asks, “What is the secret of the attraction that there is for me in this man?... How useless to ask these questions! Mr. Blake has given me a new interest in life. Let that be enough, without seeking to know what the new interest is” (418). And towards the novel’s end, Ezra is present to witness the death of his superior and employer, Mr. Candy, whose death is narrated by Ezra in the following way: “A woman’s name, as I suppose—the name of ‘Ella’— was often on his lips at this time. A few minutes before the end came, he asked me to lift him on his pillow, to see the sun rise through the window. He was very weak. His head fell on my shoulder. He whispered, ‘It’s coming!’ Then he said, ‘Kiss me!’ I kissed his forehead” (483). It seems pretty clear here that “Ella” is a misnomer for “Ezra,” and that Ella being “supposedly” a woman’s name hints at the complex gender identity of Ezra; and in Mr. Candy’s final moments, his final kiss is from his lifelong friend and assistant, Ezra Jennings. Both in terms of gender and sexuality, Ezra appears a very queer character indeed.

But Ezra perhaps exists as a contradiction to my theory of queer materiality, or at least, is suggestive of something more complex; for, despite being arguably the novel’s “freakiest” and queerest character, Ezra does not emerge as a haunting force destabilizing the normative world. If anything, he is the glue that holds it together, for he is instrumental in bringing about the heteronormative union between the beautiful, rich Miss Rachel Verinder and the handsome Franklin Blake. Ezra reflects, “Is it possible... that I, of all men in the world, am chosen to be the

means of bringing these two young people together again? My own happiness has been trampled underfoot; my own love has been torn from me. Shall I live to see a happiness of others, which is of my making[?]" (419). Indeed, though Ezra has his own melancholy— his own mad griefs, and disappointments in love and life— his satisfaction comes not in materializing the normative world as mad, queer, or freakish; rather, Ezra finds happiness in being the agent that stitches the normative world back together.

At the same time, his method of bringing this union about is of queer material. As I wrote in Chapter One, a part of queer materiality in the Victorian age is the uncomfortable proximity that the scientific establishment shares with the paranormal and the pseudosciences, such as (but not limited to) spirit manifestations and mesmerism. Ezra's method of bringing Franklin together with Rachel is through a scientific experiment that includes drugging Franklin with opium. Without getting mired in the complexities of the plot, the idea is that in drugging Franklin with opium, and watching his movements at night, Ezra can prove that Franklin unconsciously stole the Moonstone, and thus cannot be held responsible for its theft. But the normative world is at first skeptical of Ezra's idea: "It was mischievous... it looked like a piece of trickery, akin to the trickery of mesmerism, clairvoyance, and the like. It unsettled Miss Verinder's house, and it would end in unsettling Miss Verinder herself" (422). Thus, Ezra engages too in the production of queer materiality: in turning to the "freakish" trickery of para-scientific experimentation, Ezra threatens to undo the whole estate, destabilizing the normative materiality of both the house and its heiress. And indeed, Ezra makes a spectacle of Franklin Blake— he turns him, briefly, into a freak on display, as a host of characters follow him, silently spectating his unconscious movements while drugged on opium to see if he can be acquitted of the Moonstone theft. But despite this temporary destabilization of the normative, Ezra's experimentation is a success for

the normative world, as it succeeds in proving Franklin's non-liability and in bringing about the desired union between him and Rachel. What Ezra's story tells us then, in contrast to Rosanna and Limping Lucy, is that there are other methods for queer materiality than haunting, and that queer materiality has a wider functionality than the previous chapters suggest: that perhaps, queer materiality can result in an assimilation of sorts, wherein the "mad freak" becomes accepted into the normative world because of their utility— for, in destabilizing the normative order of things, there exists the chance that wrongs can be undone, that errors and deviances can be smoothed out, and the world returned to the "normal" way it once was.

This is a less revolutionary vision of queer materiality, admittedly. But I also think that, for those existing on the margins of society, we must be wary of how revolutionary tactics and methods can be assimilated and subsumed into the normative and the mainstream, utilized as a means to recenter normativity and outcast again the queer, mad freak to the edges of the material world. Indeed, queer materiality's biggest vulnerability is perhaps its inextricability from the normative world— in order for there to be a queer materiality, a stable normative order must preexist. *The Moonstone* seems to offer a range of solutions to this problem— Limping Lucy wants to remove herself from the normative all together, and live in companionship with Rosanna in the throes of London; Rosanna wants to be accepted into the normative order, and when this is an impossibility, she haunts the normative and creates the necessary space for her own mad, queer desire; and Ezra wants to be accepted into the normative order, and succeeds in that regard, finding happiness in being a useful resource bringing about the heteronormative union. And so, perhaps we can conclude by saying that the ultimate significance of queer materiality is in how it centers the desires, the thoughts, and the feelings of those relegated to the margins of society, granting agency to their lives through queer material existence.

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