

## Pre- Oedipal Lucy Snowe: Isis Unbound Over Castrated Male Body

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### Abstract

*Villette* written by Charlotte Bronte is a journey of a woman called Lucy who absolves her 'self' of the representation of the Victorian ideals, which patriarchal authority always wished to impose on the woman in 19<sup>th</sup> century. This paper attempts to show the reader how Charlotte Bronte achieves to create pre- Oedipal female identity and the necessity of the physical or metaphorical death of the patriarch for the revolutionary change in woman's social, economical standing in Victorian period. I will attempt to prove my argument in this paper basing a mythical analogy to Isis- Osiris myth and Nina Baym's famous article *The Madwoman and Her Languages*.

**Keywords:** Pre- Oedipal, Bronte, Female, Isis, Victorian Age, Castration

## Pre- Oedipal Lucy Snowe: Enemeye Gelen Kadın Hürriyeti

### Özet

Charlotte Bronte tarafından yazılan *Villette* 19. yüzyılda ataerkil otoritenin kadın figürüne daima empoze etmeyi arzuladığı Victoria dönemine ait değerlerin temsili olmaktan kendini soyutlayan Lucy adında bir kadının yolculuğunu anlatmaktadır. Bu makale Charlotte Bronte'nin Pre- Oedipal kadın kimliğini nasıl yaratmayı başardığını ve Victorian dönemindeki kadının ekonomik ve toplumsal pozisyonundaki devrimsel değişiklik için erkeğin fiziksel ya da sembolik ölümünün gerekliliğini okuyucuya göstermeyi hedefler. Bu makalede öne sürdüğüm bu tezi Isis- Osiris mitini ve Nina Baym'ın ünlü makalesine *The Madwoman and Her Languages* dayandırarak kanıtlamaya çalışacağım.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Pre- Oedipal, Bronte, Kadın, Isis, Victoria Dönemi, Kastrasyon

## Introduction

The very term pre-Oedipal suggests the primacy of Oedipal phase. Why not call the Oedipal phase the “post-Cerean”? Even more bizarre is the coinage phallic mother,” which suggests that the child responds to the pre-Oedipal mother only because he or she believes that the mother has a penis. The pre-Oedipal mother is rudely rejected when the child discovers the mother’s appalling “lack,” such rejection indicating that the attachment to the mother was based on fantasy, now to be rectified by the Oedipal phase. In a word, the child was never really attached to the mother, only fantasized such an attachment; the real attachment was always to the father. (Baym, 2010, p. 288)

And Isis reconstructed each piece of his husband’s, Osiris’ dismembered body one by one. And there was only one piece left to be restored: Penis. And not even thinking a moment, she restored to Osiris’ body and made woman bound to the authoritarian penis and thus sentenced woman everlasting phallic servitude. If Isis had presaged the forthcoming menace the woman would face, would she have restored it to his husband and made herself submissive and subjugated? Would she have put herself to the periphery? It is only a question never to be answered. She would have usurped the power attaching the penis to her self. Not a chance she had to turn the clock back. And Isis was *bound!!!*

The Isis- Osiris myth is the most elaborate and influential story in terms of restoring male power in the human history. Isis had a chance to discover her own identity over her husband’s dead body but she did not dare to face what was behind the mirror. She was not courageous enough to set out a voyage from the way of being to the way of becoming since in this voyage there would not be any ancestral woman traces to be followed. Only through this voyage to dark, untrodden paths of the unconscious, she could have unclothed and seen her own identity starkly and might have discovered that she had once a penis long before the male authority. However, she preferred to stay in the existing order and identity created by the male power. This masochistic Isis voluntarily chained herself to the rock waiting for the vulgar to rip the penis off which she once had in the pre-Oedipal period.

It is not until Charlotte Bronte or Lucy Snowe in *Villette* is torn in the same situation Isis had once found. But this time, the situation is different. The reader faces a profile of woman who has come to senses after experiencing bodily and mentally torture in the history of patriarchal hegemony. Such awareness is created in woman. Charlotte Bronte and Lucy

Snowe are no more naive enough to place penis to male body but to themselves to create pre-Oedipal female identity in the world by breaking off the chains of Isis and making her unbound.

My purpose in this paper is to show the reader how Charlotte Bronte achieves to create pre-Oedipal female identity and to prove the necessity of the death of the male body in order to place power in woman.

*Villette* is a journey of a woman called Lucy who absolves her 'self' of the representation of the Victorian ideals, which male power always wished to impose on the woman in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Charlotte dissolves these ideals one by one beginning with the idea of home. Charlotte Bronte annihilates the idea of home in *Villette* as the outset of this voyage for Lucy. The reader sees that Lucy, whose parents have been shipwrecked in a storm at an early age, absolves herself of the representation, which is the creation of the concepts of home and family. The reader realizes that death is depicted as a welcome escape from the persecutions of the familial created identity.

Lucy's statement "I know not that I was of a self-reliant and active nature, but self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances (Bronte, 1984, p. 47)." shows the reader that her quest that starts with lacking a family is the irony of fate but not a voluntary action. Lucy is the chosen one by Charlotte Bronte that will walk in the untrodden paths of the darkness and discovers the pre-Oedipal female that has been kept and hidden in the depths of the unconscious by the male authority.

Lucy's description of the ship the *Vivid* that will take her to *Villette*, "I thought of the Styx and of Charon rowing some solitary soul to the Land of the shades (Bronte, 1984, p. 68)", reminds the reader of Jason and Argonauts' voyage to the unknown. In this dark voyage, Lucy senses the danger lurking in the unknown. She knows that she has to face this danger to get the real female identity into surface. This impending danger is waiting her in Madame Beck's school, which is the restored male power, M. Paul, a professor of literature. Anne Hogan argues that in *Villette*, Charlotte Bronte's characterization of Paul Emanuel offers 'a shrewd critique of the men and aspects of Victorian masculinity' (Bradstock, 58).

M. Paul's constant observation, instruction, admonishment to Lucy hints the subjugation and imprisonment of woman in the Victorian Era. M. Paul who realizes the rebellious side in Lucy forces her to behave in the proper manners for a young lady in Victorian age. He tries to tame her. However, She is decisive not bow down before this

challenge. Charlotte ushers Lucy at a point where she has to cut off all the bondages that block her way in her quest.

The reader can see her first insurrection in the act of school play. Although M. Paul drags Lucy into the Pensionnat's attic and locks the door behind her to cow her into making her rehearsal for the play and although he pulls her down to the very kitchen, she never yields to his attempt for controlling her body. Lucy rejects exchanging her own clothes for her fop character's costume.

To be dressed like a man did not please, and would not suit me. I had consented to take a man's name and part; as to his dress--halte la! No. I would keep my own dress; come what might. M. Paul might storm, might rage: I would keep my own dress. I said so, with a voice as resolute in intent, as it was low, and perhaps unsteady, in utterance (Bronte, 1984, p. 193).

Lucy adamantly walks in the path of self-discovery despite M. Paul's wish to destroy her autonomy through incessant attempts to control over her body.

Lucy questions notions of male-centered show and exhibitions of female bodies particularly in the art gallery scene where she sits before the painting titled "Cleopatra".

Lucy, who describes Cleopatra as greedy, lazy, slack, bawdy, compares her with the ideal Victorian woman figure. So the question comes to surface: Who is actually an ideal Victorian woman? The identity of the ideal Victorian woman is fundamentally determined regarding to social and familial duties since woman is seen as the angel in the house and as helper of the husband. And her social duty is to pass down Victorian patriarchal norms to future generations. Misreading of angelic role gives one a hint about the truth behind the world of appearances in Victorian period. She is submissive, economically dependent, devoid of intellectual life, above all, she is imprisoned in her house. In other words, she is Isis bound.

Cleopatra's lustful appearance challenges ideal pictures of the self-effacing, altruistic, and domestic angel of the house depicted in mid-Victorian era. Lucy's preference to observe Cleopatra is a kind of revolt against the culturally created woman in Victorian age.

Paul expresses his anger at Lucy's bold gaze of, yelling, "How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garcon, and look at that picture [the 'Cleopatra']?" (Bronte, 1984, p. 291).

Although M. Paul fails in his attempt, he tries to control Lucy again in this scene saying to Lucy to "turn to the wall and study your four pictures of a woman's life," "La vie d'une femme," instead of observing what he sees improper for an unmarried woman to view (Bronte, 1984, p. 286-87).

However, Lucy depicts the culturally created women as hypocritical and degraded ones. One of these women exits a church, another prays in ruined way, another takes care of a baby, and the last surveys a monument with a little black girl (2:287-88). Lucy sees these paintings as traps to canalize woman into the predetermined discourses which male authority have structured. She says they are as "insincere, ill-humored, bloodless, brainless nonentities! As bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers (Bronte, 1984, p. 288)."

Lucy wishes to kill the submissive, altruistic angel of the house. And she extends her authoritative claims pushing Paul away the periphery and observing Colonel de Hamal in a feminine way.

What a figure, so trim and natty! What womanish feet and hands! How daintily he held a glass to one of his optics! With what admiration he gazed upon the Cleopatra! And then, how engagingly he tittered and whispered a friend at his elbow! Oh, the man of sense! Oh, the refined gentleman of superior taste and tact! I observed him for about ten minutes, and perceived that he was exceedingly taken with [the "Cleopatra"]. So much was I interested in his bearing, so absorbed in divining his character by his looks and movements, I temporarily forgot M. Paul... (Bronte, 1984, p. 292)

Lucy contrasts Cleopatra as enormous, ostentatious, and disorganized, with de Hamal who is tidy, cultivated, and elegant. The reader realizes that power passes in Lucy's hands. Lucy sees herself as observer of the male body. Lucy feels:

I am a rising character: once an old lady's companion, then a nursery-governess, now a schoolteacher,' she tells Ginevra Fanshawe, an elegant young lady with no career aspirations whatever. (Bronte, 1984, p. 394)

Pushing Paul away to the periphery, and gazing womanly figured de Hamal, Lucy in her quest of identity deconstructs and reconstructs the masculine perceptions of woman's body. She seems to turn it upside down. The observer becomes the observed and visa versa. In

brief, Lucy displaces authority to the woman by decentering the domineering man as controller and observer of the female body.

Moreover, the ghost of nun haunting Lucy makes sense for Lucy any more. She is the symbol of abused innocence buried alive by a conclave of monks for her sin against her vow in middle ages. Her soul has been trapped between the worlds. She reminds the reader of Isis bound. After questioning the apparitions, She realizes that she had to stand tall against male authority in order to let the nun rest in peace and make Isis unbound. However, Lucy has to kill this ghost for the resurrection of nun not as a subjugated but as a female in the power: "I tore her up . . . I held her on high . . . I shook her loose . . . And down she fell . . . and I trod upon her" (Bronte, 1984, p. 681).

### Conclusion

The only way to displace power to female in this world for Lucy is to rebel, kill and bury the culturally created woman in order to let her soul free from all the shackles of phallic authority. Lucy's burial of letters coming from Graham is such an act of rebellion to the male-centered world.

Lucy's evolving relationship with Paul forces him to confess his love for Lucy and Lucy for him. Then they get engaged. But this engagement is the last stage for Lucy to sustain the pre-Oedipal female and to relocate power to female in this world. But she has to break the mirror to see the real female identity and let Isis free.

Charlotte clears her path compelling Paul to go on a voyage. Before his departure, Paul says to Lucy:

you shall live here and have a school; you shall employ yourself while I am away; you shall think of me sometimes; you shall mind your health and happiness for my sake, and when I come back—" There he left a blank. (*V*, 714). (Lamonica, 2003, p. 205)

In the end, Paul and Lucy's engagement is finally sealed by Paul's death. She has the authority and penis over Paul's dead body. Many feminist readings insist upon Paul's death as the only means by which Lucy can fully exercise her own powers (Lamonica 2003, p. 230). Charlotte here does not wash her feet twice in the same water as Isis did in terms of restoring

male power in the world. Bronte tells the reader that pre-Oedipal female identity can only be possible over a castrated male body.

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