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Sewing up Separated Spheres: Charlotte Brontë's Vision of Feminist History in *Shirley*¹

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Introduction

Shirley (1849) is set during the Luddite Movement of 1812. According to Terry Eagleton, Brontë was covertly projecting issues concerning contemporary Chartism onto the Luddite Rebellion because Chartism was a “fraught and precarious” topic when *Shirley* was written (45). However, this article argues that Brontë’s retrospective setting should be reconsidered as an exploration of feminist history and that, through this exploration, she describes a way for women to increase their influence outside the domestic sphere. By comparing the presentation of female characters across the two generations in the novel, we can see that Brontë is using sewing as a motif to explore the history of women’s emancipation. Even though Helene Moglen notes that “men and women are mysteries to one another: inevitably sealed and separate” (164), in *Shirley*, Brontë attempts to merge separated male and female worlds into one.

Against the background of the rebellion of the working class in response to mechanisation in 1812, Brontë drew connections between “the plights of male woolen workers and middle-class female homemakers” (Capuano 231). Both unemployed workers and women are excluded from the industrialised world. Considering that the understanding of “separate spheres,” domestic and public spheres, was influenced by the Industrial Revolution in England (Ross 228), women in *Shirley* show various attitudes towards their domestic duties, especially sewing, and their place in society. Some women in the novel believe in the idea that

domesticity is their domain, but some of them do not think that women should be separated from the outside world and confined at home, which suggests the awakening of a proto-feminist consciousness.

While Brontë was writing *Shirley*, she wanted to establish her reputation in her social sphere but faced a crisis in terms of her domestic role: her brother, Branwell, and her two sisters, Emily and Anne, died; her father suffered from illness and needed his daughter's care. In her letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, Brontë wrote that:

If duty and the well-being of others require that you should stay at home, I cannot permit myself to complain, still, I am very, very sorry that circumstances will not permit us to meet just now. I would without hesitation come to—, if Papa were stronger.... (Gaskell 301)

This letter demonstrates that Brontë had a strong sense of duty as a daughter, which is the opposite to the rebellious spirit shown in her novels. However, Brontë managed to find a balance between her domestic affairs and her writing career. For Brontë, fulfilling her duties at home and speaking as a female writer in the social sphere did not seem to be contradictory. Brontë projects her anxiety and wish for women to move freely between the domestic and public spheres onto female characters in *Shirley*.

I. Hortense Moore and Mrs. Yorke: Women's Duty to Defend the Domestic Sphere

In *Shirley*, the more conventional female characters inherit patriarchal values from the past, hence Hortense Moore and Mrs. Yorke advocate the ideal of separate spheres for men and women. They regard sewing at home as a woman's duty and train young women to be self-sacrificing. A needle, the tool by which women can create their record of family history, is a symbol of feminine domesticity; the act of sewing within the home emphasises the distinction between the female domestic space and the male public sphere, and, by doing so, it reinforces conventional gender roles.

Hortense Moore is an unmarried woman looking after Robert Moore's home.

At the same time, Hortense teaches her sister, Caroline Helstone, French and other domestic duties. As Nancy Quick Langer points out, forcing Caroline to accept her rightful place in the patriarchal society, Hortense assumes the role of Caroline's mother empowering her to maintain the patriarchal order (278). When Hortense first discovers that, as an eighteen-year-old girl, Caroline is unskilled in needlework, she thinks it is deplorable that no one taught Caroline in her childhood. Hortense is good at doing needlework and regards it as "one of the first 'duties of woman'" (79):

She [Hortense Moore] by no means thought it waste of time to devote unnumbered hours to fine embroidery, sight-destroying lace-work, marvellous netting and knitting, and above all, to most elaborate stocking-mending. She would give a day to the mending of two holes in a stocking any time, and think her 'mission' nobly fulfilled when she had accomplished it. (79)

For Hortense, needlework, a traditionally female activity, embodies women's virtues: of being self-sacrificing, patient, and silent. She educates Caroline that "when the gentleman of a family reads, the ladies should always sew," although Caroline complains that "if I sew, I cannot listen; if I listen, I cannot sew" (88). Hortense's words indicate that women should be docile before the patriarchal authority figures, which is demonstrated by them fulfilling their duty diligently. Even though sewing, knitting, and stocking-mending reflect women's history in domesticity, the repetition of stitching emphasises women's unequal status. Considering the background of the Luddite Movement, women's needlework was often viewed as dreary and outdated in the upcoming mechanical age. Peter J. Capuano argues that "...the redundancy of human hands caused by mechanisation in the mill is concurrent with a surplus of female handiwork in the novel's middle-class home" (232). Like unemployed people in the working class, women from the middle class were separated from industrial society and they were inferior in socioeconomic status.

Hortense feels satisfied in accomplishing her mission in her brother's house, but she is trapped by her duty as a woman. Hortense, for instance, always rummages

through her drawers: “an unaccountable occupation in which she spent a large portion of each day, arranging, disarranging, rearranging and counter-arranging” (75). Hortense’s repetitive rearrangement of her drawers is similar to her repetitive motions in needlework, which implies that being confined in the domesticity, women’s labor becomes aimless and repressive.

Like Hortense, Mrs. Yorke conforms to patriarchal norms and fulfills her duties as “a very good wife” and a “very careful mother” (142). As Hortense tries to make Caroline an ideal woman, Mrs. Yorke attempts to change her daughters into women of “dark and dreary duties” (144) like herself and admonishes them that “discretion and reserve” are the “best wisdom” of a girl (150). In addition to disciplining the girls, Mrs. Yorke intends to preserve order in terms of domesticity by keeping out intruders who threaten the stability of morality:

... she [Mrs. Yorke] has not yet found out that he [Robert Moore] is hampered by a secret intrigue which prevents him from marrying, or that he is a wolf in sheep’s clothing; discoveries which she made at an early date after marriage concerning most of her husband’s bachelor friends, and excluded them from her board accordingly: which part of her conduct, indeed, might be said to have its just and sensible, as well as its harsh side. (147-48)

Mrs. Yorke’s harshness or her strict sense of principles reinforces her image as a guardian at home. Being empowered to fulfill women’s duty in terms of justifying moral rules, she is in a strong position in the domestic domain to weaken male power. However, this seems like a scheme devised by the patriarchy: consolidating women’s supreme standing in the family rationalises the prejudice that women should be confined in the domestic sphere and be separated from the male world so that they cannot wield their power of moral judgment outside the home.

Mrs. Yorke seems to be powerful in her domain, but she is not an equal authority figure to her husband at home:

Mrs Yorke often complained that her children were mutinous. It was strange, that with all her strictness, with all her ‘strong-mindedness,’ she

could gain no command over them: a look from their father had more influence with them than a lecture from her. (383)

Therefore, unlike women whose power is unimpressive in the public sphere, men play the dominant role in the domestic sphere. Men move freely between two spheres, while it is difficult for women to escape from the scenario of being separated from society.

II. Caroline and Shirley: Anxiety of Entering into Womanhood

Realising that the female activity of sewing can prevent women from entering the social sphere, Caroline and Shirley show disgust at sewing because they fear becoming trapped within the home. Shirley and Caroline are usually considered to be binary opposites in the novel because as an heiress, Shirley is rich and she continues to build up her assets from her land and the mill, while Caroline is poor and dependent on her uncle.² Yet, Susan Zlotnick argues that “although Shirley’s wealth gives her an extraordinary degree of autonomy over her own life, it does not lend her any political power to intervene in public events” (293). Therefore, Shirley and Caroline face the same predicament: they are separated from the public sphere.

Caroline Helstone, the niece of Rev. Helstone, shows her disgust at sewing, especially at philanthropic sewing of the “Jew’s basket” (71) which is passed among Christian women of a parish and forcedly sold to the local “heathenish gentlemen” at an unreasonably high price (108).³ Robert recognises Caroline’s reluctance to devote herself to unpaid labour and self-abnegating sewing:

“Anything more Jewish than it—its contents, and their prices—cannot be conceived: but I see something, a very tiny curl, at the corners of your lip, which tells me that you know its merits as well as I do...” (71)

Like the buyers who pay “above cost price, for articles quite useless to them” (109), Caroline feels deceived by her domestic duties which emphasise Christian self-sacrifice but bring no actual financial return for her. Thus, attracted by the prevalence of trade and business in the public sphere, Caroline reveals her deep desire to identify her value in society by thinking that:

Nature had made her a boy instead of a girl, that she might ask Robert to let her be his clerk, and sit with him in the counting-house, instead of sitting with Hortense in the parlour. (75)

Caroline always wishes that she was a boy, but she cannot rebel against Hortense on the issue of sewing:

She [Caroline] did a few rows every day, by way of penance for the expiation of her sins: they were grievous burden to her; she would much have liked to put them in the fire...(79)

Caroline feels guilty because as Hortense says, she should have learnt feminine duties from childhood. When Caroline intends to give up on repairing the hose, the sense of guilt is highlighted. Therefore, she chooses to endure the dreariness of needlework. But learning to be an ideal woman does not succeed in making Caroline a good match for her cousin Robert because he will not marry a woman without property:

Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions; utter no remonstrances: it is your best wisdom. You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyred; do not doubt that your mental stomach—if you have such a thing—is strong as an ostrich's—the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind: in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob. (101-02)

Caroline's soliloquy shows that as a woman, she must suppress her emotions when her love for Robert is rejected. Her desire for love is repaid by "a stone," which implies unrequited love. However, Caroline must endure the reality that Robert cannot marry her and to do so would be self-destructive. She attempts to repress her passion by digesting and becoming one with the cold stone, thus she becomes "paler" (171), "white-cheeked" (183), and sits "still as a garden statue" (368). In

addition to the image of “stone,” considering the motif of sewing in the novel, the scorpion’s stinger seems to recall the image of the needle in women’s hands, which symbolises the destructiveness brought by women’s duties. For Caroline, once she closes her fingers upon the poisonous needle to be an ideal woman, she has to endure the pain caused by her unrequited passion silently and sacrifice her love for Robert.

Caroline is without the “weapons” to tempt Robert because she is not very attractive, she is not particularly wealthy, and significantly, she has no other suitors who might increase her attractiveness to Robert as a “sexual object” (Mitchell 67). Knowing that she cannot marry Robert, Caroline fears becoming an old maid whose “place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted” (169). Even if, to some degree, old maids are free from the duty of wives and mothers in the family, they still need to be self-sacrificing towards others according to the patriarchal expectations for women. Moreover, old maids were despised and marginalised in the patriarchal system because a woman’s place in society was defined by “her desirability to men”, which ultimately justified women’s existence (Langer 281). Thus, being an unmarried woman is not a way for Caroline to win an equal role to men in the patriarchal system.

In order to offset her depression caused by lovesickness, Caroline desires to be a governess outside the home but her idea is rejected by others. However, Caroline does not rebel against them and thus “to wait and endure was her only plan” (229). Endurance, a female virtue, is fatal, which triggers her severe illness. Beth Torgerson argues that Caroline’s illness is the result of her desiring to lead the life of wife and mother in the patriarchal culture (7-8). Her anxiety about becoming an old maid and working as a governess outside the home keeps her away from the ideal role of wife and mother in the patriarchal society. However, illness brings Caroline back to her gender role in the patriarchy. Caroline wished to be a boy, but like Catherine Earnshaw’s delirium, which “classifies her as a delicate woman who is unable to control her wild passion” (Yin 16), after Heathcliff’s flight in *Wuthering Heights*, Caroline’s severe illness is caused by a depressed passion, which

categorises her into the stereotype of women who are weak physically and mentally. Moreover, Caroline's illness is a transition for her and allows her to make her mother responsible for finding her a "suitable social identity and moral character" (Brumberg 134). When Caroline is close to death, Mrs. Pryor reveals her true identity, as Caroline's biological mother, who saves Caroline physically to some degree by relieving her depression caused by her unrequited love. Mrs. Pryor's maternal love melts the statue-like Caroline, as we mentioned before, and brings her to life:

Instead of a marble mask and glassy eye, Mrs Pryor saw laid on the pillow a face of pale and wasted enough, perhaps more haggard than the other appearance, but less awful; for it was a sick, living girl—not a mere white mould, or rigid piece of statuary. (414)

Despite her discovery of maternal love, Caroline does not recover from her love sickness until Robert proposes to her. Marriage restores the patriarchal order for Caroline in the end.

In contrast to Caroline, Shirley Keeldar is "quite a woman and something more" (194). Like Caroline who tries to work outside the home, Shirley desires to invade the male sphere. She claims that "the counting-house is better than my bloom-coloured drawing room: I adore the counting-house" (195). During the raid on Robert's mill, however, Shirley is excluded from the men's plans to defend the mill at night, even though Shirley is the mill owner, which indicates that she cannot break the boundaries between the two genders, even though she is rich. Standing far away from the circle made up of Robert, Rev. Helstone, and the other men, Shirley speculates that they are having a "war-council" (297), which demonstrates that Shirley feels that she has no right to participate in these discussions. She and Caroline can only intrude into the enclosed male world through their imaginations. They are marginalised by the men talking about the upcoming conflict.

However, philanthropy is a way for Shirley to exercise her power within the social sphere, which might transform these separate spheres into shared spaces. Cathy Ross notes that in nineteenth-century Britain, women belonged to the

domestic sphere and were considered inferior to men, but as advocates for Christian values, they could extend their influence outside domesticity through charitable activities and social reform (229). Unlike Caroline who has no money to help the poor, Shirley takes three hundred pounds from her deposit to help the starving people around her and claims that “the curates were to have no voice in the disposal of the money” because “subordination and silence best became their years and capacity” (255). As a benefactress, Shirley has power over male curates in the charitable activities in which the power roles of men and women are reversed.

Even though it is difficult for Shirley to win an equal position to men in the public sphere, she is reluctant to fulfill the duties of domesticity. She is impatient with sewing: “she takes her sewing occasionally: but, by some fatality, she is doomed never to sit steadily at it for above five minutes at a time....” (364), and “she is just about as tenacious of her book as she is lax of her needle” (365). Like Caroline, who realises the pain and repression brought by women’s virtue, Shirley is aware of the self-destructiveness of women’s duties “by some fatality” (364), so she rejects sewing. After she is bitten by a supposed mad dog, however, Shirley does begin to take up sewing. According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Shirley’s wound is a visible sign of her painful fall, which is similar to the dog bite that sends Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* into the confinement of her gender (393). Thus, the blood loss of a dog bite carries with it a sexual connotation that Shirley becomes a woman physically. After she suffers from symbolic castration in a Freudian sense, she identifies herself as a woman by fulfilling women’s duties.⁴ In the scene where Shirley reveals her fears of death to Louis Moore, Shirley goes to visit Louis who “had found her at her needle: she brought her work in her hand” (472). Shirley does not refuse to sew, which suggests that she hides her fear of entering into womanhood. Sigmund Freud argues that women’s weaving imitates the veil of public hair modeled by nature and that women weave threads to mask the shame of the absence of the penis (132). In a sense, in the case of Shirley, sewing’s implication is similar to that of weaving. Shirley’s sewing rejects the loss of strength caused by the wound on her wrist, which seems to conceal the painful fact of her

symbolic castration. Yet, Shirley restores her wholeness as a woman by taking up her needle and engaging in a traditionally female activity. Shirley's symbolic castration, which indicates that she enters into womanhood or domesticity, is a precondition for her to marry Louis Moore.

Ultimately, Caroline and Shirley are forced to submit to their powerlessness as women after suffering from severe illness and symbolic castration respectively. In the end, they enter the domestic sphere through marriage; however, as Robert promises, Caroline and Shirley will manage a Sunday school after their marriage, which suggests that they can increase their involvement in the social sphere.

III. Rose and Jessy: Sewing up Separated Spheres

Although Caroline and Shirley fail to crawl out the "windowed grave" (377), Brontë seems to suggest another option for women in the form of two minor characters, Rose and Jessy, who are the daughters of the Yorke family. Charles Burkhart notes that "others, especially the seven members of the Yorke family, are granted more pages than their limited contribution to plot or theme justifies" (81). Indeed, further exploration of this issue suggests that the two girls of the Yokes, especially Rose, represent a more optimistic depiction of female emancipation.

Jessy Yorke, an eleven-year-old girl, wants to marry when she is old enough and stays in the domestic sphere; however, Rose Yorke is endowed with a rebellious consciousness. She rejects being a woman and dislikes being confined at home, like her mother. Rejecting Mrs. Yorke's satisfaction in fulfilling the duty of "womanly and domestic employment" (378), Rose has a different understanding of women's duty:

And if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will *not* deposit it in a broken-spouted tea-pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things. I will *not* commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose. I will *not* prison it in the linen-press to find shrouds among the sheets: and least of all will

I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder. (378)

Before she is sixteen years old, Rose decides to learn needlework or to fulfill a woman's duty, as defined by the patriarchy. Rose powerfully declares that: "I will do that, and then I will do more," (379) which suggests that in her eyes, sewing and other women's duties guide her to explore her talent in the wider world.

By comparison with the two heroines, Caroline and Shirley, Rose and Jessy are only mentioned in two chapters; however, as an omniscient narrator, Brontë juxtaposes two girls' futures. In Rose's debut in *Shirley*, Brontë portrays that "she [Rose] has never rebelled yet; but if hard driven, she will rebel one day, and then it will be once for all" (144). After twenty years, Rose travels abroad with her sister Jessy and they are unmarried, which implies that Rose rebels against her parents successfully. As Rose wishes, she goes to the wider world to discover her talents, which include but are not limited to domestic skills. Nora Gilbert points out that from a "runaway-woman perspective," Rose's flight from domesticity is something that other Brontë heroines dare not do (286). Yet Rose's rebellion, by leaving her home and making her way in the world, comes at a price. Unfortunately, Jessy dies in a foreign country and Rose is left alone. The death of Jessy implies the dangers of the outside world, and the price women must pay when they leave the protective shelter of the home. At least, Rose and Jessy go to a new country, which is a breakthrough.

Rose Yorke was modelled on the biography of Charlotte Brontë's friend, Mary Taylor. After Taylor lost her sister Martha, who was the model for Jessy in *Shirley*, Taylor emigrated to New Zealand in 1845. Knowing that Taylor would live abroad, Charlotte Brontë wrote to Emily in 1841:

Mary Taylor and Waring have come to a singular determination,... They are going to emigrate—to quit the country altogether. Their destination unless they change is Port Nicholson, in the northern island of New Zealand!!! Mary has made up her mind she can not and will not be a governess, a teacher, a milliner, a bonnet-maker nor housemaid. She sees

no means of obtaining employment she would like in England, so she is leaving it. (Shorter 239)

This letter indicates that women in Victorian England were limited in their occupational choices, but Taylor could change her status quo by running away from the patriarchal system of England. Taylor found it was also difficult for her to start her own business abroad and “Brontë envisaged Taylor as lonely and homesick, which sometimes she was, but it was unlikely that she would have admitted defeat and returned home” (Bellamy 119).

Therefore, in the novel, Brontë leaves the question of Rose’s future uncertain: “will she ever come back?” (145). Anna Lepine notes that “Brontë’s open-ended narration of Rose Yorke is left like a loose thread at the centre of the novel that threatens to unravel the entire romance structure” (123). The mystery surrounding Rose’s destiny implies a certain anxiety that history might repeat itself and that Rose might be forced to return home. However, Rose does get to write her history outside of the domestic space, which provides another option for women in the patriarchal society by going abroad.⁵

Brontë narrates Rose’s future that “the little, quiet Yorkshire girl is a lonely emigrant in some region of the southern hemisphere” (145) in the present tense, which indicates that the uncertainty regarding Rose’s fate might reflect Brontë’s anxiety as a female writer in the nineteenth century. For Brontë, like “some region of the southern hemisphere”, writing is a foreign land full of dangers for women writers. Yet Brontë did not conceal her talent in domesticity. In *Shirley*, we see that Brontë made a compromise with the happy ending in the male writing tradition shown in the two heroines’ marriages. However, the eponymous character’s marriage acts rather like a camouflage for Brontë’s more radical thinking; the conventional ending allows Brontë to defend female autonomy more covertly. Rose and Jessy’s more progressive future, in which they learn to fulfill their domestic duties and they also get to travel into the wider world is hidden away in the middle of the novel.

In Charlotte Brontë’s two novels, *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*, written before

Shirley, the heroines Frances Evans Henri and Jane Eyre enter the public sphere by working as teachers or as governesses. However, the boundary between the domestic and public spheres is distinctive and gendered. In *The Professor*, although William Crimsworth, Frances's husband, agrees with his wife that she can continue working after their marriage, he says that he "seemed to possess two wives" (TP 186). This indicates that by moving between separate spheres, Frances loses her wholeness as a woman. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane pursues her values, as a governess in Thornfield Hall, and claims powerfully that:

... they [women] need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do...and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (JE 129-30)

Yet, Esther Godfrey argues that after Jane marries Rochester, she goes back to the domestic sphere in which giving up her previous position as a paid governess, Jane becomes "the new unpaid feminine status of mother" (868). Jane's return to domesticity shows that she makes an either-or choice between her career and her role as a wife. However, women's duties at home and their ambition outside domesticity are not oppositional but contribute towards each other, which is implied in *Shirley*.

Although the two heroines, Caroline and Shirley, give up pursuing their values in society as men, in the case of Jessy and Rose, Brontë provides an alternative option for women: running away from England. Unlike Caroline and Shirley, Rose does not show a desire to enter the male world by wishing to be a man and refusing to learn domestic duties. Showing an ambiguous attitude towards the social sphere, Rose wants to explore a new sphere in which women's duties are not a hinderance for women but a foundation to develop more skills. This suggests that Brontë is attempting to subvert the binary division of the male and female spheres and to

merge them into one shared sphere in which women have more opportunities to use their talents.

Conclusion

Across the two generations, women in *Shirley* endow sewing with various meanings, which allows readers to contemplate the boundaries between the female domestic space and the male public sphere. Charlotte Brontë examines the autonomy of her female characters through their relationships to sewing, which suggests a dynamic and progressive process by which the boundaries between the male and female spheres dissipate over the course of two generations.

Women like Hortense Moore and Mrs. Yorke accept their traditional gender roles, as guardian angels at home, to maintain the patriarchal order and defend the domestic sphere. For Caroline and Shirley, who are women in the younger generation, they are endowed with a rebellious consciousness, and they hesitate to fulfill women's duty as defined by patriarchy. However, they ultimately recognise their powerlessness and accept their gender identity through marriage. By contrast to Caroline and Shirley, who fail to escape from marriage, Rose and Jessy provide another choice for women's future. Rose not only fulfills her feminine duties but also ventures into a new world full of dangers and possibilities. Exploring her talents, Rose uses her needle to connect separate spheres. As a whole, Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* implies the awakening of a proto-feminist consciousness, arguing that women can and should have it all: they should be able to enjoy a fulfilling domestic life and to take advantage of their talents by entering the wider world.

Notes

¹ This paper is based on the revised manuscript of the oral presentation at the conference of the Kyushu Branch of the English Literary Society of Japan held on October 22nd, 2022.

² To specify that Caroline and Shirley are binary opposites, see Helene Moglen's *Charlotte*

Brontë: The Self Conceived.

³ For further discussion of antisemitism in Brontë's era, see Nadia Valman who mentions that "in the last few years the Victorian period has become a subject of particular interest for critics who see the beginnings of both modern antisemitism and modern Jewish identity articulated in nineteenth-century print culture" (235).

⁴ To specify the definition of "female castration," I have referred to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*: "How can a girl 'become a woman' and be castrated (that is desexed) at the same time? Considering how Freudian its iconographic assumptions are, the question is disingenuous, for not only in Freud's terms but in feminist terms, as Elizabeth Janeway and Juliet Mitchell have both observed, femaleness—implying 'penis envy'—quite reasonably means castration" (272).

⁵ Considering the female emigration in 1840s, Anna Lepine argues that "the emigration context Brontë had in mind was one related more closely to women's limitations in England than to forced exile" (130); see also Helene Moglen who notes that "for the woman who, like Rose,...who defines herself in terms of freedom and possibility, for a woman refusing alienation, a new home must be built on alien soil" (168).

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