

## Charlotte Bronte's Alternative Enlightenment: The Muslim Other in *Villette*

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### Abstract

In her novel *Villette* (1853), Charlotte Bronte, unlike many of her contemporary British novelists deploys the Muslim *Other* as an effective rhetorical and figurative device. The main character in this late eighteenth-century novel, Lucy Snowe utilizes Arab, Muslim and in particular Turkish cultural allusions, symbols and images for the sake of verifying her day-to-day experiences. Lucy seems to achieve emotional security while using imagery from the *One Thousand and One Nights*. The *Other*, according to Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi (1995), "is the ultimate signifier of everything I am not[...] has often been defined as 'women' or African or Asian- and hence the Other is what is feared, what exists to be conquered" (p. 216). Bronte in *Villette* seems to use the Muslim other as a signifier of almost everything Lucy Snowe goes through in her daily life. Bronte in *Villette* represents a unique case of a British novelist who seemed to have truly believed in egalitarian Enlightenment ideas. Involving ideas of progress, tolerance and the removal of censorship, Immanuel Kant (1784) defines the Enlightenment in his famous essay "What is Enlightenment?" Kant explains that "it is the freedom to make public use of one's reason at every point" (p. 2). Bronte reveals her freedom of reason while transcending in the novel national and entrenched cultural biases against Muslims. In many ways, Bronte in *Villette* creates an Enlightenment *cosmopolitan* space.

**Keywords:** *Villette*, Cosmopolitan, Egalitarian, Turks, Muslim Other

### Charlotte Bronte's Alternative Enlightenment: The Muslim Other in *Villette*

In her novel *Villette* (1853), Charlotte Bronte, unlike many contemporary British novelists who seemed to have been more accustomed to use predominantly negative depictions uses the Muslim *Other* as an effective Rhetorical and Figurative device. The main character in the novel Lucy Snowe utilizes Arab and Muslim cultural allusions, symbols and images apparently for the sake of verifying her day-to-day experiences. Lucy finds solace and seems to achieve more emotional security while recalling imagery from the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Consequently, Bronte in *Villette* develops the *Muslim Other* as an effective rhetorical device to expose what she considers as the brutalities and oppression of the outside world against her main character Lucy Snowe. Whenever Lucy finds herself in an oppressive environment in which she feels overwhelmed by a particular situation, she creates her own fantasied escape. This constructed means of escape usually involves introducing fictional characters from the *One Thousand and One Nights* who passed through difficult situation and then reflect on how they succeeded. Sometimes, Lucy utilizes the *Muslim Other* as a mean to expose some of the brutalities associated with some social situation. Being a stranger in *Villette*, Lucy encountered few situations in which she had to deal with Mrs. Beck, the intrusive and aggressive landlady/school mistress.

The novel is somewhat based on Charlotte and her sister Emily Bronte's visit to Brussels. They travelled in 1842 to Brussels to enroll in a boarding school; Charlotte taught English, while Emily taught Music. The sisters' time was cut short by the death of Elizabeth Branwell, their aunt who at the time was taking care of her sister's children. Published in 1853, *Villette* chronicles the life of its narrator Lucy in the imaginary Belgian town of Villette. She is poor and friendless, later hired as a teacher by Madame Beck, an authoritarian headmistress. Lucy falls in love with Madame Beck's despotic cousin, professor M. Paul. Emmanuel. Suffering from isolation, Lucy's gothic reading, and her reading of the *One Thousand and One Nights* enables her to blend the supernatural and real in order to negotiate her relationship with other characters in the novel. The novel ends with ambiguity when M. Paul. Emmanuel travels by ship to the West Indies. The reader is not exactly sure whether Emmanuel will ever come back to reunite with Lucy.

Bronte in *Villette* presents a unique case of an early Victorian novelist who seemed to have transcended, to some extent, entrenched national and cultural biases against non-Europeans. For example, Islamic cultures, literatures and even Islam as a religion seemed to have represented an ever-present spirit *us mundi* for Lucy Snowe. Lucy tends to examine *almost* whatever events happening in her life through an adopted Eastern and Islamic perspective. She does not only rely on her native English culture, language and culture, but seems to derive most of her day-to-day vocabularies from the *One Thousand and One Nights* Arabian stories. She becomes infatuated with Muslim culture to the extent that she continually constructs meanings out of her personal experience upon "oriental" mental frameworks. Bronte in fact creates a cosmopolitan space, some kind of a universal intelligence, breaking away from conventional and contemporary depictions of the East. She attempts in fact to create an alternative enlightenment by adopting an egalitarian worldview.

The author of this essay does not *pretend* to argue that Charlotte Bronte's Lucy Snowe relies only on Islamic thoughts and values while living in the town of Villette. However, the *One Thousand and One Nights* in particular represent a moral and mental gateway to a fuller understanding of the social realities surrounding Lucy Snowe. Lucy seems to be more mentally

and psychologically at home, and more engaged with plots of popular fictional Eastern tales. She uses such a non-European literary plots and characters as effective cosmopolitan cultural references from which she attaches meanings to her daily experience. For instance, the *One Thousand and One Nights* seem to provide Lucy with peculiar methods of thinking she uses to negotiate the social complexities in her environment. Above all, she seems to feel more comfortable in the presence of Ali Baba, Saladin, and Scheherazade than with Nelson, Byron or any other real or fictional Western counterparts.

Brontë, as I will argue later in this essay, appears to emphasize the importance of looking at the world as a *cosmopolitan* universe full of various races and cultures, yet of equal importance. Brontë confirms such egalitarian outlooks in the attitudes and behavior of her major character Lucy Snowe. Lucy does not seem to mind deriving legitimacy of the "truthfulness" of her daily experiences from Oriental literature. It must be pointed out that Brontë does not enact a full enculturation of Eastern cultures. However, she creates in her novel many situations and events in which the "Oriental" and especially the Muslim *Otheris* introduced as a part of the larger eighteenth-century globalized world. For example, in *Villette*, Brontë quotes heavily from the famous *One Thousand and One Nights*. She repeatedly introduces Turkish, Arab and Muslim fictional characters as if they are familiar figures in her specially constructed Villettian world. She also borrows many of her novel's plots from eastern real and fictional contexts. This does not mean that *Villette* is an Eastern novel. For example, commenting on her work as a teacher in Madame Beck's school, Lucy explains that her work "had neither charm for my taste, nor hold on my interest." What seems to matter most for Lucy is "to be without heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial; the negation of severe suffering." She overcomes her anxieties through leading two separate lives: "the life of thought, and that of reality." Lucy's life of thought is "nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy." (p. 140).

In this essay, I will examine some the uses of the images of the Muslim *Other* in Brontë's novel *Villette*. Brontë's use of the *Otheris* peculiar because instead of being used a derogatory term, she uses it in a way that makes it positive. Her choice of literary contexts; borrowing some plot elements from *One Thousand and One Nights* underlines Brontë's positive use of the Muslim *Other*. This rather unconventional use of the *Other* as a positive fictional element in the daily life of Lucy constitutes a unique utilization of Eastern images in early Victorian literature. While doing so I will underline and analyze what I consider as important episodes in the novel where Brontë seems to deploy the Muslim *Other* as a powerful rhetorical device to clarify and comment on ambiguous events and characters in Lucy's life. Such ambiguities usually arise during direct interactions between the rather reserved Lucy Snowe and other characters in the novel. Such interactions between Lucy and the outside world seem to lead her to rely on her previous readings about Eastern culture and literature and legends.

Lucy primarily relies on *One Thousand and One Nights* to make sense of reality. She seems more adept at negotiating thorny social issues if she places them within a personally constructed Eastern mental framework. In other words, she uses the "Arabian Entertainment" to entertain alternative interpretations of her daily experiences. During such "eastern" moments in her daily life, usually taking the form of daydreaming, the Muslim *Other*, instead of being introduced in a contemporary typical negative depiction or as a curious exotic object of marvel, it plays a more positive role in Lucy's daily experience. Using Muslim characters and situations in complex ways rather than stereotyped and negative ways allows Lucy to face her conflicts more easily.

Unlike many of her early nineteenth-century contemporaries, Bronte treats Muslim historical and fictional characters not primarily as representatives of a foreign or an inferior race or culture, but equal human beings whom she tolerates, at least within the specially constructed "cosmopolitan" world in *Villette*. For example, a few nineteenth-century British writers tended to deploy what one may describe as a negative typical discourse about Arabs and Muslims in General. Usually called *Mohammedans*. For example, ShahinKuli Khan Khattak(2008) in his book *Islam and the Victorians: Nineteenth Century Perceptions of Muslim Practices and Beliefs* indicates that the Bronte sisters seemed to have been influenced by Victorian depiction of Muslims. As well as Muslims, the "Irish were equally the 'other' for the Victorians" (p. 52).

Whether compared or contrasted intellectually or politically with Europeans, the Mahomed an individual, his culture, society and even mentality is usually depicted through-out late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century British literature and journalism as less humane, more chaotic, less intelligent than their supposed superior European counterparts. However, common negative depictions about Muslims did not seemed to have hindered Bronte from using the Muslim Other in her fiction.

As a case in point, nineteenth-century literary discourses about Islam in general tended to focus on the political, social and cultural deterioration of eighteenth-century Mongol Empire in India. Such perceptions of the incivility of Islamic cultures coincided with an expanding role of Bretttons in India and Asia. The Mogul Emperor for contemporary British journalists became a figurehead, supposedly unable to practice full political power on his Nabobs. Though it is valid here to argue that the late eighteenth-century Mogul Empire was experiencing its most chaotic era, yet British officials in India seemed to have found it quiet easy to collaborate with minor provincial rulers (Nabobs). In his *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire* Robert Orme (1782) adopts an early dehumanizing discourse about Muslims. According to Orme, the "Moors [Indian Muslims] hold the office of a scribe in contempt: commerce therefore cannot be held by them in honour" (p. 70). He goes on to demonstrate the spread of bribery even in the judicial system of Indostan. Like many of his contemporary authors, Orme deploys a prevalent dehumanizing discourse about Muslims or Moors. Even though Moghuls and Moors were Muslims from different parts of the world, however negative attitudes towards them were common to all. It seems that few writers in early Victorian period were able to distinguish the cultural, geographical and historical differences between Moghuls and Moors. It is much easier to combine these different Muslim identities in one common stereotype. Yet, many eighteenth-century English historians of that period might have argued that Islamic jurisdiction toward the end of the eighteenth century was more developed than in Europe.

What is remarkable about *Villette* is Bronte's apparent persistence to present an egalitarian world, which she constructs while apparently using the Muslim *Other* as a successful trope. She seems consciously aware about her rhetorical process, in which she adapts, deploys and persistently uses Eastern imagery and motifs. As readers, we continue to encounter different Eastern figures in the novel from Pashas to a Cleopatra and a Vashti: The *Oriental Other* in Charlotte Bronte's *Villette* becomes a representative of Bronte's unique egalitarian perspective. Likewise, her main character Lucy's imagination constructs an egalitarian world where it is possible to blend both Islamic and Christian cultures. Snowe reveals a curious affinity with other human beings. She seems to be at home while talking about or recalling Eastern tales and exotic fictional characters.

Some critics may consider such egalitarian treatment of Eastern themes and imagery in eighteenth and nineteenth century British novels as a typical fictionalizing of the exotic. However, the elaborate plots, rhetorical maneuvers Bronte consistently deploys usually revolve around Eastern fictional figures. For instance, Bronte's recalling of the Eastern Muslim Other seems to be an attempt to re-qualify it and its culture as legitimate sources of fictional inspiration. In other words, though Orientalist discourse was used during the mid-eighteenth century, especially while discussing the history of the *Saracens*, the infidel Turks, Bronte's more positive use of it as a tool of verification of Lucy's daily experience remains unprecedented. For example, Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffrey Cass (2006) in their book *Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual Approaches and Pedagogical Practices* explain that "British citizens travelling throughout the Oriental world[...] were hybridizing (as Homi Bhabha has defined the concept) and modernizing" (p. 2). Hoeveler and Cass argue that "the donning of indigenous garb by Lady Mary Wortley, Lord Byron, and Sir Richard Burton indicates one of the ways that the 'lived perplexity' of Orientalism can be approached." This lived perplexity of the Orient, according to Hoeveler and Cass, is more "complex, nondualistic paradigm" (p.3).

However donning the oriental fictional masks, adopting the persona of an Eastern visitor to Europe, did not always serve its intended purposes: exposing the shortcomings of contemporary European governments and societies. In fact, such literary Orientalism found its detractors in the twentieth century. As a case in point, the late Edward Said (1978) in his book *Orientalism* underlines what he argues to be the complicity of such literary texts and their role in paving the way, according to Said, to later colonialism. However, Bronte introduces in *Villette* a new approach toward human relations, more cosmopolitan in nature, combining East and West. Her novel seems to pave the way toward a more egalitarian world.

For instance, Bronte consciously combines her interest in Eastern culture and transform this interest in *Villette* into an integral part of the fabric of her narration. She introduces the figure of the Eastern other, albeit borrowed directly from the *One Thousand and One Nights* stories, and it introduces Muslims in *Villette* as equally respectful human beings. She achieves this respectability of Muslims through referring to Eastern fictional characters, like Saladin, as equally heroic as any other Western heroic character. Saladin, Sinbad and Ali Baba become role models for imitation for Lucy. She creates scenarios in which she meditates on how Saladin would, for example, behave in this or that situation. Bronte seems eager to use the literary symbols of the East as vehicles to ascertain and sometimes to qualify the daily experiences of Lucy Snowe. Bronte however introduces the Muslim Other free from typical late eighteenth-century British misconceptions.

Baron Montesquieu (1721) in his *Persian Letters* translated into English in 1730, George Lyttelton (1735) *Letters from a Persian in England* and Oliver Goldsmith (1762), "Chinese Letters" and *Citizen of the World* tended somewhat to exaggerate the Oriental environment. In such "oriental" texts, one can discover a variety of depictions. In Montesquieu's *Letters*, for example we encounter an ideal Oriental individual whose supposed moral outlook surpasses his European counterpart. Though Montesquieu 'oriental speaker condemns fallacies of contemporary European societies, yet he continues to be an *outsider*. Bronte was so infatuated with the supposed exoticism of the east that she wrote stories about genies in her early and still unpublished writings like "A Song of Exile on Seeing the Ruins of the Tower of Babel."

Elizabeth Gaskell (1857) the biographer and friend of Charlotte Bronte reports in her *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* that "a curious packet confided to" her "containing an immense amount of

manuscripts, in an inconceivably small spaces; tales, dramas, poems, romances, written principally by Charlotte" (p. 93). Gaskell in the *Life* inserts a copy of a letter written by Charlotte Bronte listing what she describes as "Catalogue of my Books, with The Period of their completion up to August 3rd 1830 [sic]." She mentions among her early writings "Chief Geni in Council," a Song of Exile on Seeing the Ruins of the Tower of Babel [sic] (p. 95). Such juvenile literary compositions might not have been fully developed like *Villette*, however, they testify to Bronte's Eastern interests.

Moreover, Gaskell includes in her *Life* (1857) a letter by young Charlotte in which she begins her address to the imagined editor of the "Little Magazines" she, her sisters and brother Barnwell wrote. In this highly imaginative letter she begins by telling her readers that "it is well known that the Genii have declared that unless they perform certain arduous duties every year, of a mysterious nature, all the worlds in the firmament will be burnt up" (Gaskell, 1857, p. 104). Gaskell comments on this curious composition by predicting that the letter "may have had some allegorical or political references invisible to our eyes" (p. 105). It is however impossible to predict exactly the nature of the allegorical references Bronte was using. Yet it is safe to argue here that the highly imaginative young Bronte reacted to contemporary political and social events. She might have been commenting on the British political arena.

Though she does not advocate colonialism, however Bronte is eager to use Eastern literary allusions as topics of discussion through which her major character Lucy Snowe can interact with the outside world. In other words, Lucy's interest in the *exotic* is certainly part of the larger British contemporary infatuation with Eastern culture and literature. Bronte's utilization of Eastern themes in *Villette* serves more particular functions in her narrative, besides being sources of fictional inspirations, she uses these eastern themes order to construct an egalitarian world. Such egalitarianism I argue is a product of the *Enlightenment*.

One of the enduring Eighteenth-century European enlightenment's ideas is "cosmopolitanism." Some European intellectuals, writers, and philosophers of the nineteenth century seemed to have wanted to achieve an egalitarian world based on the idea that Man can perfect his human existence and that he is able to transcend historical religious, cultural and racial biases. Therefore, creating a cosmopolitan or a universal world, according to the Enlightenment's tenets is a primary purpose for intellectuals. The maintaining of such cosmopolitan conception of human existence paves the way toward human progress.

According to the *The New International Webster Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language* (1998), "cosmopolitan "relates to "common to all the world" and "at home in all parts of the world" (p. 294). Lucy uses some literary allusions from the *One Thousand and One Nights* in different situations during her daily life. Such deployment of exotic allusions reflect her latent and cosmopolitan desires. Her constant recalling of stories, allusions and anecdote from *One Thousand and One Nights* underline Bronte's egalitarian thinking. These egalitarian tendencies take the form of rhetorical devices Lucy consciously uses to verify her daily experience and in fact to make sense of her surroundings.

To illustrate this point further: Lucy utilizes Eastern historical figures (usually placed in fictionalized contexts) like Saladin or Cleopatra in order to create her own egalitarian and cosmopolitan world. What characterizes this creation of special universal contexts in which all human beings can freely interact is that they are usually free from any possible contemporary national limitations or racial prejudices. Lucy recognizes the importance of Saladin and actually seems to identify him as archetype of moral heroism. It is actually this kind of mental and psychological freedom from the usual European chauvinism that one repeatedly encounters in

Bronte's novel. It is important at this point of the discussion to examine those instances in *Villette* where Lucy reveals her infatuation with all things Eastern. The peculiarity and singleness of vision Bronte reveals in treating the Arab, Turkish and Muslim other is remarkable because it reflect a tolerant cosmopolitan voice in the middle of extreme intolerance toward the non-European Other.

Bronte first introduces the Muslim other in the novel when Lucy tries, in one of her numerous soliloquies, to describe to herself a strange incident she witnessed while in Madame Beck's house. The owner and headmistress of the boarding school Madame Beck is outwardly kind, however she is also intrusive and despotic while dealing with Lucy. It happens that Dr. John Bretton Lucy's friend was visiting the Beck's family. Dr. Bretton is the son of Lucy's godmother Mrs. Bretton. Bronte portrays him as a cheerful character, and as a good-looking gentleman. He works as a physician in Villette. He seemed to have fallen victim to the immature flirting of Desiree, the young daughter of Madame Beck! The Lady of the house, Madam Beck invites him to examine young Desiree who was feigning sickness. Desiree wishes Dr. Bretton to prolong his stay at the house so she can enjoy more of his company.

In order to soothe the feelings of his young patient, Dr. Bretton somewhat willingly accepts to stay for more time. Out of courtesy perhaps, he indulges young Desiree's whims. Lucy, who was present at the time, wonders about Desiree's bold behavior. She reflects on such childish frolic, and instead of continuing to be a detached observer of the scene, Lucy attempts to understand Desiree's playful and childish flirting. As such, Lucy explains Desiree's attitudes toward Dr. Bretton through recalling a similar situation in the *One Thousand and One Nights!* Lucy starts to examine such curious behavior (flirting) relying not on her limited life experience, but on oriental literature. She uses the exotic literature of the East (i.e. *One Thousand and One Nights*) as one of her major referential points. For instance, it happens that the daughter of Madame Beck feigned her sickness in order to be attended by the handsome Dr. Bretton. He visits her in her bedroom and finds her in bed surrounded by her pillows and bed covers. While observing such coquettish behavior Lucy recalls a scene from the *One Thousand and One Nights* to make sense and *decipher* what's was happening in front of her. Lucy finds similarities between Desiree's behavior while sitting in her bed and that of a Turk! For Lucy, Desiree's affectation of sickness and flirting toward Dr. Bretton are "like a Turk amidst pillows and bolsters" (Bronte, 1853, p. 162). Although this image of a Turk sitting in his bed surrounded by pillows sounds like highly sexualized, however, Lucy uses it to show how despotic and childish is Desiree. Even though she looks, sitting in her bed, secured and healthy, yet, Desiree instantly changes her behavior when Dr. Bretton arrives. Lucy visualizes an exotic Turkish scene and uses it to expose Desiree's duplicity. Although the comparisons between Desiree's behavior and that of A Turk in one story in the *One Thousand and One Nights* might seem rather far-fetched, however, Lucy seemed to have succeeded in exposing the artificiality of Desiree's coquettish behavior.

Moreover, what is fascinating about Lucy's use of Eastern images is that they tend to become the norms rather than the exception in the narrative. In other words, Lucy uses the Oriental literary theme as a rhetorical device in order to make sense of different life situations. In the case of Desiree for example, Lucy could have used a basic interpretation of teenage expected behavior in order to clarify why Madam's daughter acted so strangely with Dr. Bretton. However, Lucy, who seemed to have already been versed in all things oriental seems to insist that it is more practical to utilize her rhetorical powers using linguistic and moral tools directly borrowed from a different non-European culture. Moreover, Lucy seems to find it edifying to

borrow such non-European cultural icons (i.e. Muslim culture and literature), archetypes, images, descriptions in order to understand the truth. Perhaps she even insists in using Saladin in order to read through the implications of other people's behaviors. The highly imaginative and meditative mind of Lucy Snowe makes use of Oriental trope in order to make sense of the complexities of social surroundings. For example, one day, "while he [Dr. Bretton] sat in the sunshine, and [Lucy] was observing the colouring of his hair," she compares "his beamy head in [her] thoughts to that of the 'golden image' which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up [sic]" (p. 163). Lucy is trying here to make sense of Dr. Bretton's personality by putting him "under a direct, inquiring gaze" (p. 163).

Lucy is almost always thinking in / about oriental milieus and characters. She uses them as referential points of departure to understand the outside world. She also seems eager to legitimize her personal experiences within such Eastern settings. Charlotte Bronte seems to adopt certain narrative techniques in *Villette* as the ultimate legitimizing tool. In other words, the kind of legitimization Lucy needs is to ascertain her personality in the face of a domineering Madam Beck. For instance, Lucy, lives under the shadow of the domineering personality of Madam. She needs to solidify her daily experience within a rather complicated narrative framework. She feels that she has to deal with Madam's moody behavior, while at the same time she recognizes her ambiguous relationship with other characters in the novel. In order to achieve peace of mind, Lucy approaches such new daily experiences through adopting a universal outlook, a more tolerant understanding of universal cultural and religious differences. For instance, even while dreaming, Lucy relies on eastern images to make sense of her dreams. In order to explain the ambiguity of one of her dreams, negotiate through its complexities, she recalls a story from the *One Thousand and One Nights* of "Bedridd in Hassan, transported in his sleep from Cairo the gates of Damascus" (p. 240). He was married to Sittelhosn, a beautiful young woman and "borne away miraculously to Damascus, where he became a pastry-cook" (p. 607).

Considering Bronte's cotemporary milieu it sounds rather too optimistic to adopt an essentialist point of view toward her universal outlook. However, she does not seem to provide an escape for Lucy through using Eastern imagery. On the contrary, Lucy seems more familiar with Eastern tales that she finds it easy to recall some of their events.

Laura Ciolkowski (1994) in her article "Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*: Forgeries of Sex and Self" recognizes Lucy's eagerness to validate her daily experiences. She argues for example that "Lucy is a self in translation as well as in transition in *Villette*, delighting in and encouraging the narrative confusions for which "Currer Bell," *Villette's* pseudonymous author, was notorious" (p. 7). Such transition of the self or the intended confusion of narrative in the novel, I would argue underlies almost all daily interactions of Lucy with Madame Beck, her colleagues and even the Bretton family. As a case in point, she is constantly reflecting on the nature of her relationship with other characters. Not being sure about the nature of those relationships does not mean that Lucy is distrusting all. However, she continues to reflect on whether these characters help her understand the complexities of the outside environment. The translation of the self in the novel takes the form of attempting to stabilize the instability and to see through the vagueness of the outside environment. Lucy's familiarity with Eastern tales seems to influence those who are close to her. For example, commenting on the "school-project" of Lucy, M. Emanuel calls it "an Alnaschar dream," yet another reference to the *One Thousand and One Nights* that tells the story of a man who invested his money in glassware, later smashing it accidentally (p. 573). Lucy's ability to validate some of her daily experiences by comparing them to fictional experiences she reads about in Eastern literature constitutes one form of translating the self. In other words, she

continues to translate and interpret some of the complexities in her daily life through using metaphors, images from the East as vehicles to achieve more clarity in her points of view.

Such self-conscious tactics influence Lucy's interactions with the rest of the character in *Villette*. She achieves a much needed tranquility by instantly resorting to Eastern tales and to her beloved Saladin, if possible. The Turk, the Muslim *Other* seems to provide Lucy with more confidence and self-assurance.

One of the best psychological methods Lucy opts to make sense of her experience is through implicitly and sometimes more explicitly quoting archetypal stories in Eastern literature, from the *One Thousand and One Nights* in particular. As this essay will argue later, Brontë tends to use the Oriental\Eastern imagery\themes\concepts as important legitimizing rhetorical and thematic tools in the novel. To illustrate further, Brontë achieves this process of acculturation seriously by transforming it into favorite intellectual and spiritual ammunition for Lucy. Very unlike many late eighteenth-century contemporary British writers, Brontë seems more relaxed while she consciously adopts *Oriental* themes in her fiction.

Noting that "the Orient" has always been "elusive" to Western civilization (ix), Thierry Hentsch (1992), in his book *Imagining the Middle East* writes that the Middle-Eastern *Other*, is at once the site of the commonplace, the word for "the exotic, catalyst of contradiction and excess" (p. ix). Hentsch explains that the Middle Eastern Other, or what he calls as the Orient was perceived at the same time "wise and irrational, ascetic and voluptuous, cruel and refined" and it is "the primeval dawn and night of history" (p. ix). However, he illustrates that such Western constructions of the ME implies a foreign figure that is a more of a figment of a disturbed European psyche. He argues that such perception of irrationality does not seem to account for the richness of Middle Eastern history and its true impact on European literature. What is needed according to Hentsch's a more subtle and meticulous re-reading of the representations of the *Other* in Western consciousness which should reexamine the salient characteristics of the process of othering of the Middle Easterner (shifting, distorted, interchangeable). Brontë in *Villette* seems to introduce a re-reading of the other in early Victorian literature. For example, Lucy's frequent use of Eastern images seems to indicate her willingness to reexamine the process of othering. The Eastern other in the novel becomes a stable point of reference, which Lucy can deploy as her personal moral compass whenever she needs some help in understanding her surroundings.

What is remarkable in Brontë's treatment of Eastern figures in her novel is that they seem more rational, predictable, and not stimulators of "excess" (Hentsch, 1992, p. ix). Indeed, Lucy seems more at home while recalling images from the *One Thousand and One Nights*, which makes Brontë exceptional in her tolerant treatment of Muslim figures and subjects. For example, Lucy finds it empowering to describe her style of writing as "words scattered here and there - not thickly, as the diamonds were scattered in the valley of Sindbad, but sparsely, as those gems lie in unfabled beds? Oh, Madame Beck! How seemed these things to you?

[sic]" (Brontë, 1853, p. 377). She knows that Madame Beck reads her personal letters. However, Lucy wishes that she evaluate her letter writing skill according to its exotic nature, and apparently not according to its Englishness. According to Lucy, her "words"

should be considered by the formidable Madame Beck as gems lying on imagined Eastern beds (p. 377). Brontë here seems to avoid, perhaps intentionally, comparing Lucy's style of writing with English rhetoric or correct syntax. She finds it perhaps more civilizing to maintain the exotic nature of Lucy's writing. In other words, the glamorous Eastern imagery used in the self-dialogues of Lucy seems more appealing to Brontë than the practical English

tongue. With the absence of specific proof that Bronte favored Lucy's colorful rhetoric, she might have been satirizing it. However, Bronte wrote a letter to her publisher George Smith on November 3 1852 to comment on the novel's plot. She contrasts Lucy with Dr. John Bretton whom she describes as "far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited and sweet-tempered." (Smith, p. 209). One can juxtapose this Brontian use of the Muslim other as an effective rhetorical device with previous and contemporary early nineteenth-century representations of the East in Western culture.

Thus, in *Imagining the Middle East*, Thierry Hentsch (1992) begins his introduction of what he describes as the historical construction of the image of the Orient by emphasizing its ethnocentrism. This Western construction of Islamic culture and historical or imagined figures played a significant role in creating a repertoire of images about the East in general. These Eurocentric representations of Islam seem to have been readily used by all kinds of European writers (p. xiv). What is curious about Hentsch's discussion of Western manipulation of the images of Islam is that he does not consider this historical process as a fault. He does not consider "ethnocentrism" as a fault to be set aside, nor is it merely a sin a critic might wipe out through repentance. Instead, he argues that it is a prerequisite of our (Western) vision of the other. Ethnocentrism, according to Hentsch, "is constitutive of our understanding of the other; it obliges us constantly to return to our point of departure, if only to seize the internal and external important factors which shape our interest about the other" (p. xiv). Bronte in *Villette* reflects one particular European vision about Islam. She chooses however to invest more positive efforts in finding common grounds with the Muslim other.

In order to have a deeper understanding of Charlotte Bronte's use of images of Islam in *Villette* we might need to place it within its historical context. In fact, to create a new form of critical pedagogy that addresses the construction of the image of the Other in late eighteenth-century British texts one needs, at least briefly, to touch on the seminal metaphors and images used by earlier writers to represent Arab, Muslims, native American-Indians, and others. For example, some of the typical images of Muslims in Victorian Britain might have included adjectives such as savage, superstitious usually associated with *Mahammedanism*. Perhaps the Victorian discourse about Islam and Muslims was not as polarizing as in earlier eras; however, it tended to be rather negative. Some writers invoked the superiority of Christianity over Islam.

In addition, one can argue here that Hentsch's discussion of the creation of the Other in the Western mind corresponds to Norman Daniel (1960) in an argument he made in his book *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*. He argues for example that the representation of Islam in the medieval period was more a matter of stereotypical miscomprehensions than of facts. Hentsch, like Daniel before him, traces the origins of how Western civilization conceived its Other which he describes as the "Orient."

However, Hentsch, while discussing this creation of the Orient in Western imagination goes beyond what Daniel examines in his famous book. He points out that the European-constructed image of Islam continues to be essentially the creation of a relatively narrow literate section of Western Christendom—the rest would be uncertain speculation (Hentsch, p.24). This essay agrees with both Daniel and Hentsch and emphasizes that the stereotyping of the Islamic Other in particular is more complex. During the eighteenth century few writers were able to sift through negative representations of Islam and attempt to reflect a more authentic representation. Even though Bronte does not seem to have shown more knowledge about Islam than any other contemporary British writers, she is able to deploy a more unique understanding of cultural diversity. In other words, Bronte insists in *Villette* on overcoming the typical Eurocentric and

Ethnocentric conception of Islam and thus she is able to use Muslim culture and Muslim figures, even if fictional, in making sense of her main character's realities. For instance, Bronte utilizes Eastern tropes for specific narrative purposes. She derives such tropes from the fact the Eastern Other in almost all of its manifestations was actually visible in Britain.

A Turk, a Muslim and even a Saladin from *One Thousand and One Nights* could be easily materialized for Bronte because he as a real human being was present in London during the nineteenth century. This is clear from earlier writings about the presence of Muslims in the London's exchange. For example, Kirstin Olsen (1999) argues in her book *Daily Life in 18th-Century England* that from 1689 onward "brokers met at Jonathan's Coffee-House in Change Alley, this in time became the site of the London Stock Exchange." Olsen explains:

There, according to Voltaire, one could see a Jew, a Mohammedan, and the Christian deal with each other as if they were of the same religion, and give the name of infidel only to those who go bankrupt" (p. 191).

The *Mohammedan* Other appears vividly in *Villette*. Though he might take the form of a Turk, however the Muslim figure whether fictional or real historical characters are quite visible in the life of Lucy Snowe. She uses the Other as a vehicle to achieve a more effective interaction within her social and "familial" environment. For instance, while visiting the Bretons, John invites Lucy and his mother to the theater. When Lucy arrives at the hall, she is startled by its magnificent lights. She seems unable to comprehend the luster and lights in the theater being her first time to visit such a place of public gathering. What seems to strike most in the theater is the shape and luster of a hanging chandelier, which she describes as a "Pendant from the dome, flamed a mass" (Bronte, 1853, p. 285). However, in order to familiarize herself with this new scene, the chandelier, which "dazzled me - a mass," Lucy promptly concludes that it "seemed the work of eastern genii." She tells her readers that "I almost looked to see if a huge, dark, cloudy hand - that of the Slave of the Lamp - were not hovering in the lustrous and perfumed atmosphere of the cupola, guarding its wondrous treasure" (p. 286).

The Grand buildings she visits in the town of Villette, luxurious concert halls and even the coquettish Desiree seems to appear in Lucy's mind as manifestations of an imagined fantastic Eastern world. It is only in such exotic literary and imaginative contexts Lucy seems to find peace and tranquility. Whenever she faces a challenging social situation, her mind willingly recurses to an imaginative Eastern environment where she becomes more skilful at understanding her surroundings. Actually, Lucy tends to recollect her thoughts and filters her peculiar conception of the social realities around her by repeatedly juxtaposing it with what she imagines to be the nature and expectation of typical Eastern milieus.

To illustrate further, while watching the play, Cleopatra at the theater accompanied by the Breton, Lucy finds herself unconsciously almost immersed in the play's constructed Eastern environment. For instance, the actress, who plays the role of the famous Egyptian queen transforms in Lucy's mind into "Vashti," the Persian queen. Though Lucy does not seem to distinguish clearly between the history of Egypt and Persia, yet she *merges* the real Greek/Egyptian Cleopatra with the queen character she remembers from her Eastern reading. What becomes more remarkable in this theater scene is that Lucy is more willing to enforce what appears to be a self-constructed reality to make sense of her surroundings. In other words, in order to make sense of Cleopatra, as both a real queen and a fictional character on stage, Lucy deploys a readily-made comparison between Persian and Greek/ Egyptian history and culture.

She might have felt that she needs to do so for the sake of admiring the stage performance she was watching.

Whether due to lack of sufficient knowledge about the differences among Eastern cultures, for Bronte, the East in general continues to be a magical world full of Cleopatra's, genies and "Saladin" (Bronte, 1853, p. 340).

In addition, Bronte's interest in Muslim culture extends to animals too. As a case in point, in *Villette* she seems to contrast what she considers as wild European animals with the more tractable Arabian animal. For instance, while contrasting the characters of Dr. John Bretton with the "little professor," Paul Emanuel, Madame Beck's "caustic" relative, Lucy thinks that the later is "rude and stubborn 'sheltie." According to her, he is very unlike the "high-courage but tractable Arabian [Dr. Bretton]" (Bronte, 1853, p. 281). Professor Manuel's sour temper and sometimes-unpredictable reaction reminds Lucy of the difficulties one may face while handling a stubborn Sheltie horse. The Sheltie refers to the Shetland pony, who according to *State master Encyclopedia*: is a "very opinionated" and "cheeky." Furthermore, if this horse is not "handled properly, [it] can be impatient, snappy, and sometimes become uncooperative" (Statemaster). Such inflexible characteristics seem to fit exactly the character of Paul Emanuel whom Lucy describes as "acerb" which mean sour and astringent (p. 281). There are other moments in the novel when Lucy seems utterly infatuated with Eastern analogies, figurative tropes, testifying to Charlotte Bronte's deep interest in "Oriental" literatures and cultures. However, this essay focused only on those most poignant episodes in the novel when the East seems to materialize in a concrete and a vivid language Lucy deploys to negotiate here surroundings. What remains to be explored is the extent such Brontian interest in the East appears in her other writings.

Bronte in *Villette* (1853) utilizes the popularity of Eastern tales in the late eighteenth century and uses its imagery, figures of speech, fictional and historical characters as mental frameworks. She uses such constructed mental frameworks to facilitate the movement of the narrative of Lucy Snowe. However, unlike many contemporary late eighteenth-century writers, Bronte seemed to have transcended to some extent racial and cultural prejudices against non-Europeans. She created a Brontian oriental discourse of her own in order to illustrate the daily experiences of her main character Lucy Snowe. Miss Snowe's frequently refers to Oriental tales, and even attempts to use Eastern figures of speech and Oriental images to make sense of information related to her interaction with other characters. This Brontian capacity in deploying Eastern culture and literature to comment on the life of Lucy Snow continues to be unprecedented in the history of English literature. Bronte helped propagate a new kind of universal discourse, an egalitarian outlook toward the world outside Europe. She deals with the Muslim other in particular as an equally respectful human being. What remains to be examined however is the impact of such Brontian cosmopolitanism on later British authors. In fact, the novel suggests a new way of reading of the Muslim other which is not essentialist. There needs to be a reexamining of the concept of othering in early Victorian literature that can shed more light on the complexity of relations between the Muslim East and West.

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