THE PASSIONATE REBEL: THE FEMALE ORPHAN IN JANE EYRE, WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND BLEAK HOUSE

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By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to address the critical significance of the female orphan in Victorian novels, and in particular, in three mid-Victorian novels: Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1853). This thesis seeks to examine the manner in which the female orphan serves to be more disruptive and destructive than a pharmakon. Then, it argues that the rebellious female orphan, instead of carrying out restoration of normalcy, must either leave or destroy the old house of patriarchy she enters into, and establishes the new order in her new home.

I divide this thesis into three chapters. In the first chapter, I read Jane Eyre’s progress in *Jane Eyre* as a rebellious text. I begin with the examination of her early experience in the Reed family as a dependent orphan and isolated outlier. When she starts to put up opposition to her cousin John Reed, she becomes extremely threatening and seizes her destructive power over the patriarchal household. Then, after examining her development as a rebellious orphan during her stay in Lowood Institute, I argue that Jane comes to her own power by her resistance against male characters who attempt to dominate her. Her rebellion finally succeeds when she creates the new family with Rochester, and maintains the reversed gender roles in their marriage.
In the next chapter, I zoom in on the two Catherines in *Wuthering Heights*, reading both as versions of the rebellious orphan. I start my reading considering the first generation Catherine as the destructive phase of the orphan narrative. I examine how Catherine starts the acts of rebellion in her childhood and how she becomes empowered being an orphan. I argue that when she reaches adulthood, she becomes locked in the struggle between her untamed female nature and conventional feminine values, and her inability to resolve the conflict leads her to death. Then I shift my focus to Catherine’s daughter Cathy, who embodies the regenerative phase of the orphan narrative. I argue that Cathy inherits her mother’s rebellious blood, but through her rehabilitation of Hareton and her union with him, her rebellion ends in a victory. She directs her future husband to “the house of her ancestors,” maintains her influence on him, and eventually succeeds in defining herself as an unconventional woman.

Finally, the third chapter perceives Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* as the rebel orphan. In the examination of the double voices in her narration, I demonstrate that Esther keeps her independence of mind and refuses to accommodate herself to conventional gender ideology. Then, by drawing parallels between Esther and other female characters in the center of her narrative, such as Lady Dedlock and Mrs. Jellyby, I argue that Esther is not the representation of Victorian femininity as many critics have recognized, indeed, she identifies herself with those wrong kinds of women she seemingly criticizes.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way.

Many thanks,
Ruoqi Shi
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INTRODUCTION

In his 2014 book *Street Urchins, Sociopaths and Degenerates*, David Floyd calls the nineteenth century “the century of orphan” (Floyd 1). As the cultural icon during the period, orphans consistently appear in the works of art and literature and thus capture immense critical attentions.

This thesis explores the female orphan characters in three mid-Victorian novels: Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1853). The central focus of my discussion is on the type of the rebellious orphan. According to David Floyd, there are five types of the orphan figures: the mimic, the rebel, the orphan of island literature, the imperial orphan, and the orphan of childhood fantasy (Floyd 8). While the subject of his study is fin-de-siècle orphans, his taxonomy is also applicable to Victorian orphans. I make use of, in particular, his first two categories to develop my argument. The mimic is the type of orphans who “endeavors to exact some semblance of identity through the imitation of other” (Floyd 9). This type employs “the orphanic attribute of malleability” and longing for the inclusion of him/herself in the society (9). The rebellious orphan “serves him/herself without any aspirations to assimilation”; he or she not only rebels against but also seeks the ruin of the social or family structures (9). By classifying the female orphan into the rebellious type, I examine how she exerts a disruptive influence on the patriarchal house she enters in and how she eventually creates her new home in which she identifies herself and sets up a new order.

While literary critics have expressed particular interest in the literary, full-length study of the figure appears comparatively scare. One of the most referenced and
influential text among criticism on the orphan is Nina Auerbach’s 1975 article “Incarnations of the Orpahan,” in which she traces the development of the literary orphan from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. Auerbach makes several interesting observations about the orphan in this text. At the very beginning of her article, Auerbach notes that the orphan is “always threatening” to, for instance, the stability of social structure. But at the same time, he is “the natural victim always managing to survive” (Auerbach 395). He acquires a mutable characteristic, which is essential to survival, and enables himself “to split his being according to the culture that contains him” (396). It becomes clear that Auerbach reads the orphan as the mimic, who is ultimately assimilated and socialized in the society. In addition to the orphan’s social position, Auerbach also takes notice of the theological aspect of the figure. For her, the literary orphan in early Victorian novels such as Jane Eyre, is endowed with a supernatural power, “establishing his [or her] connection to God” (403).

Twenty-five years later, Laura Peters engaged herself into the conversation about literary orphans in her 2000 book Orphan Texts. Peters regards the orphan as a type of scapegoat of Victorian society, but different from critics like Ellis who sees orphan the anxiety about the outsider, she claims that the real danger exists in the internal relationship of the orphan to the family. She regards the orphan as a medium for reassurance. For Peters, the appearance of the orphan makes the family unstable. Hence, the family, especially in which the concept of “legitimacy, race and national belonging” is either “unsustainable” or in crisis, needs such orphans to reaffirm itself. Peters defines the orphan condition in terms of Derrida’s use of the ancient term “pharmakon”:
The *pharmakon* is the alien intruder, the housebreaker which threatens…
‘the internal purity and security’. Yet simultaneously the *pharmakon* is the structure by which this difference is “put outside back in its place”; it is the process by which the ‘excess’ is eliminated (Peters 22 emphasis in original).

For Peters, the orphan resembles this pharmakon in “the threatening difference and is the process by which this difference is expelled” (Peter 25). In this way, the orphan produces a remedial effect on the family he or she enters into, being both “bane and blessing,” “good and evil,” “promise and threat,” and performing a “pharmaceutical function in Victorian society” (27). Both Auerbach and Peters note the orphan’s function of purification: he or she first threatens the home but ultimately assists in the reestablishment of its legitimacy. While Peters subtitles her book as *Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire*, she primarily focuses on male orphans with possible non-English origins, for example, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, whose death results in the reunification of both family and the community in general. Therefore, her theory is probably not at work in this thesis.

Other critical readings of the orphan figure have focused on, for example, the orphan’s journey to find his or her origins and identity. Dianne F. Sadoff concentrates on Dickens’s orphans and argues that they have the longing for parental embrace, who are always attempting “to determine their origins and confirm their identities” within a family structure (Sadoff 11). In their book *The Orphan Condition* Baruch Hochman and Ilja Wachs’s also reads orphans in Dickens’s novels and give a psychoanalytic analysis of their condition. For them, the sense of abandonment on the one hand, makes the orphan
“crav[e] for a return to a state of protectedness and secure maternal nurture”; on the other hand, it makes him want to take revenge on “those who are responsible for the abandonment” (Hochman and Wachs 14). Criticism on orphan has generally regarded literary orphans in the nineteen-century novel as representations of class difference, economic inequality and social injustice. For example, John R. Reed examines the social and economic conditions of orphans in domestic fiction and notes the figure being “disinheritance and exclusion from society” (Reed 258). Like Auerbach, Reed also sees orphans in relation to theological aspects. He reads them as spiritual exiles, symbolizing “the soul outcast from eternity”, and humankind’s “isolated, disinherited condition” (Reed 266). Like many other critics, Reed also consider the orphan as the mimic. By pointing out the fact that orphan novels always reconcile orphanhood with marriage, Reed states that orphan characters make an ultimate return to equilibrium.

It is notable that there is a dearth of criticism on the female orphan. In Auerbach’s depiction of the Victorian orphan, they are “all the lost boys wandering through Dickens’ London, embodying in their pathos all the Victorians” (Auerbach 415). For Auerbach, as well as many other literary critics, the orphan novel presents “a world which dwarfs the orphan heroine, over which she can exert no transforming power: she is caught in a web, unable to weave one of her own” (415). As such, critics have devoted much attention to male orphans, but relatively scant studies have been taken up on the topic of the female orphan, who absolutely demonstrates her existence in Victorian novels. My aim is to address the critical significance of the female orphan in Victorian, and in particular, mid-Victorian novels. This thesis intends to accomplish several things in light of the critical discussion of the motif of the orphan. First, it examines the manner
in which the female orphan serves to be more disruptive and destructive than a pharmakon. Then, it argues that the rebellious female orphan, instead of carrying out restoration of normalcy, must either leave or destroy the old house of patriarchy she enters into, and establishes the new order in her new home.

**Victorian Gender Ideology**

The novels this thesis explores are all set in a vague past time. There is evidence to suggest that they are set in the early nineteenth century, probably twenty or thirty years before the novels’ actual publication. For example, all the characters in these novels travel, not by railroad, but by horse: Rochester falls down from his horse when Jane first meets him, Lockwood rides to Wuthering Heights, Esther Summerson travels to Greenleaf school in a carriage. Since train travel became fairly common in the mid to late 1830s in England, all the characters are supposed to begin their lives before the Victorian period begins. However, since all three novels were written and published in the Victorian period, they definitely reflect Victorian attitudes. Literary critics have read these books in the perspective of Victorian ideology, and hence in this thesis I intend to adopt Victorian values to examine the female orphan’s unconventionality and rebelliousness.

The idealized role of Victorian women is the famous “angel in the house.” In her book *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, Deborah Gorham provides a concise definition:

The ideal woman was willing to be dependent on men and submissive to them, and she would have a preference for a life restricted to the confines
of home. She would be innocent, pure, gentle and self-sacrificing. Possessing no ambitious strivings, she would be free of any trace of anger or hostility. More emotional than man, she was also more capable of self-renunciation. The characteristics of the ideal Victorian woman can be summed up in one word: she was feminine. (Gorham 4-5)

According to Gorham, femininity is an ideological construct that presents women as the “looking-glasses” for men, enforcing the subordination of women and in turn reinforcing the Victorian concept of masculinity. This ideology assists in maintaining the system of divided spheres: the male sphere of the public – business, politics, and professional life, and the female sphere of the private – love, emotion, and domesticity. Victorian women were supposed to remain within the domestic sphere, for their primary duty was to construct the family as refuge and shelter for men: “to satisfy moral and emotional needs of men and provide them with a place of renewal, after their rigorous activities in the harsh, competitive public sphere.” On a larger scale, ideal Victorian women served “to satisfy longings to reconcile the conflict between the morality of Christianity and the values of capitalism, and to satisfy the nostalgia for a simple, pastoral past amid the realities of the urban, industrial present” (37). For the purpose of sweetening their men’s life, Victorian women were asked to never be strong-minded, indeed, they should repress their passion, anger and other dangerous emotions. Likewise, in order to maintain feminine delicacy, Victorian women should confine themselves into the household and receive limited education about art, music, poetry, etc. which could enrich the lives of their men. Neither were they encouraged to alleviate their intellectual poverty: they were not allowed to learn masculine subjects such as science and classical languages. It is
through these severe restrictions imposed on Victorian women that forced them into submission to men.

Apparently, female orphans examined in this thesis are out of the ordinary. Unlike their contemporaries, they reveal a rebellious nature in their childhood and never alter it after reaching adulthood. To understand the female orphan’s struggle for selfhood within herself between nature and culture, I employ Nancy Armstrong’s terms of “femaleness” and “femininity” in her essay “Gender and the Victorian novel,” in which she defines “femaleness” as “those aspects of character subject to natural desire,” and “femininity” as “those aspects of character subject to the constraints of politeness, good taste, and greater concern for others,” namely, Victorian expectations for women (Armstrong 112). All of them stage certain versions of rebellion against Victorian gender ideology. Jane Eyre constantly resists against women and men who attempt to discipline her, and ultimately comes into her own power. Catherine dies in her unresolvable conflict between her untamed nature and social expectations of femininity, but her daughter Cathy takes over her rebellion and finally succeeds. Esther Summerson, while appearing less rebellious, ultimately leaves the old Bleak House of patriarchy.

**Structure of the Thesis**

In the introduction of her book, Laura Peters extends the definition of the term orphan, suggesting that Victorian culture perceives the orphan not only as the one who loses both parents, but also as the one who is “deprived of only one parent” (Peters 1). From this perspective, Jane Eyre, two Catherines and Esther Summerson invariably belong to the category of orphan. In this thesis, I propose to read all these four women
characters as the rebellious orphan and examines their rebellion through the track of their progress.

I divide my thesis into three chapters. In the first chapter, I read Jane Eyre’s progress in *Jane Eyre* as a rebellious text. I begin with the examination of her early experience in the Reed family as a dependent orphan and isolated outlier. When she starts to put up opposition to her cousin John Reed, she becomes extremely threatening and seizes her destructive power over the patriarchal household. Then, after examining her development as a rebellious orphan during her stay in Lowood Institute, I argue that Jane comes to her own power by her resistance against male characters who attempt to dominate her. Her rebellion finally succeeds when she creates the new family with Rochester, and maintains the reversed gender roles in their marriage.

In the next chapter, I zoom in on the two Catharines in *Wuthering Heights*, reading both as versions of the rebellious orphan. I start my reading considering the first generation Catherine as the destructive phase of the orphan narrative. I examine how Catherine starts the acts of rebellion in her childhood and how she becomes empowered being an orphan. I argue that when she reaches adulthood, she becomes locked in the struggle between her untamed female nature and conventional feminine values, and her inability to resolve the conflict leads her to death. Then I shift my focus to Catherine’s daughter Cathy, who embodies the regenerative phase of the orphan narrative. I argue that Cathy inherits her mother’s rebellious blood, but through her rehabilitation of Hareton and her union with him, her rebellion ends in a victory. She directs her future husband to “the house of her ancestors,” maintains her influence on him, and eventually succeeds in defining herself as an unconventional woman.
Finally, the third chapter perceives Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* as the rebel. orphan. In the examination of the double voices in her narration, I demonstrate that Esther keeps her independence of mind and refuses to accommodate herself to conventional gender ideology. Then, by drawing parallels between Esther and other female characters in the center of her narrative, such as Lady Dedlock and Mrs. Jellyby, I argue that Esther is not the representation of Victorian femininity as many critics have recognized, indeed, she identifies herself with those wrong kinds of women she seemingly criticizes.
CHAPTER I

According to Sarah Gilead’s observation on orphan figures in Victorian novels, the literary orphan performs the role of the destructor who breaks with old conventions and is encouraged to create a newly-formed social and cultural order:

First, the [orphan]’s relation to society and to a seemingly vitiated cultural heritage is restored by means of crises of negation, alienation, and self-confrontation; second, [the orphan narratives] are designed as a culture-regenerating force in a bereft, conflicted society (Gilead 303).

Jane Eyre strongly embodies this kind of orphan figure: she is a growing character coming to her own power. During childhood, she is the powerless orphan girl dependent on her foster family, the Reeds. Her orphan identity makes her isolated from the family members, who see her as an unwanted surplus to be got rid of. After raising her first resistance against patriarchy in Gateshead Hall, Jane gradually comes into her own power by consistently rebelling against men who attempt to dominate her. When she ultimately creates her own family with Rochester, she becomes empowered and takes up what Victorians consider as the typically masculine, dominating position in the household. In this way, she exerts the influence of her rebellious nature and crystalizes a new order around her in the society of this novel. Jane Eyre is inevitably rebellious, for her unconventionality appears to have been determined from the very start of her life: it is rooted in her orphanhood.
The Victimized Orphan and Bewick’s Book

From the very beginning of this novel, Charlotte Brontë makes a conspicuous effort to detach Jane from Victorian domestic and gender ideology by highlighting her heroine’s unconventionality. The detachment of the ten-year-old Jane from the family circle in the first chapter builds up an initial binary relationship between the orphan girl and her foster family, the Reeds. In the opening paragraphs, Jane already perceives the difference in her body: her “physical inferiority” to the Reed kids prevents her from enjoying the outdoor exercise as they do, and it further makes her humble herself (*Jane Eyre* 9). She is then informed by her aunt Mrs. Reed that this difference extends to her disposition and inscribes her as the other. Thus, she “really must [be excluded] from privileges intended only for contended, happy, little children,” in this case, from joining the family group (9). Jane is marginalized in her foster family, which identifies her, as the narrator says in the succeeding chapter, as “a discord in Gateshead Hall” (19). Mrs. Reed uses what she defines as the girl’s unpleasant character as an excuse to keep this “discord” at a distance. To reinforce this detachment, she refuses to teach Jane proper conduct and further disables her to learn about the established conventions. In addition, Jane is also deprived of the right to ask or voice her opinion. She is compelled to remain silent until “[she] can speak pleasantly,” but she is not provided with defined standards of pleasant speaking (10). While being aware of her difference, Jane remains ignorant about how to change it; and her inability to eliminate her unconventionality subjects her to further unjust treatment. In this way, Jane has to grow accustomed to being a passive recipient of the isolation, though she recognizes her vulnerable status in the household.
In the adult Jane’s recollection of her early experience in Gateshead Hall, she ascribes the enforced isolation to what the others describe as her unpleasant character. She tells us:

I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. ... They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment. (19)

She goes on to assume that “had [she] been a sanguine, brilliant…child,” her situation would have improved to some extent (19). The interposed comment from the narrator, the adult Jane, is meant to convey how an undisciplined female spirit could threaten the Reed family as well as Victorian society. However, since she underestimates the significance of her orphan identity, her assumption remains questionable. It is the deprivation of her parents that defines Jane as an orphan and clearly differentiates her from the Reed kids. Her uncle Mr. Reed’s death somehow severs her connection to the Reeds, and the rest of the family sees her as an unwanted surplus to be got rid of. An orphan who seems to receive no inheritance from her deceased parents, she is forced to be economically dependent on her foster family, and this dependency naturally assigns her a vulnerable status in the household. It can be argued that the isolation little Jane suffers is the direct consequence of her orphanhood. An outsider and intruder, her advent not only brings about an unwanted financial burden, but also threatens domestic stability. It is therefore,
not her unpleasant character, but her identity as a dependent orphan girl that gives rise to her isolation and ultimately makes her the inevitable victim in Gateshead Hall.

Excluded from the Reed family group in the drawing-room, Jane finds shelter in the breakfast room where she reads Bewick’s *History of British Birds*. She takes the book from the bookcase, “mount[s] into the window-seat” and sits in a cross-legged position with the curtain drawn (10). Literary critics have taken notice of Jane’s reading experience. For instance, Peter J Bellis makes an observation about Jane’s visual power and discovers that: while reading, Jane is sitting at the point “where inside and outside meet,” and her position converts “a boundary line into a new interior space” (Bellis 640). Taking this position, Jane hides herself in a secluded corner and thus is protected from the outside world, the normal society. At the same time, she preserves her visual and aural access to the outside, which offers her the initiative to notice the sudden change and have an immediate reaction to it (640). In this case, making herself invisible to John Reed, Jane does not lose the ability to hear his voice. But her plan to not expose herself is foiled when John’s sister Eliza assists him in discovering her hiding-place. The window-seat resembles Jane’s position in the household. In daily life, she is entirely excluded from the family circle. Just like this window-seat, while being inside the house, she remains unobvious and invisible. However, as long as the family is in need of a victim, she immediately becomes exposed and visible.

While the window-seat provides Jane with a temporary physical refuge, Bewick’s book offers her a lasting imaginary escape from the outer reality; and the continuous appearance of the bird imagery all through her narrative reasserts the influence of this book on her development. In little Jane’s reading experience, she is
fascinated by the images of isolation presented in the book: “the bleak shores,” “the forlorn regions of dreary space,” and “the solitary rocks and promontories” where only sea-fowls inhabit are all telling her story (Jane Eyre 10). These “death-white realms” deeply impress Jane; they inspire her to formulate “an idea of [her] own” (10). From here on, she acquires this forbidden ability to generate her own ideas and tell her own story, which marks the turning point in her development as an unconventional woman.

**Jane’s Initial Resistance and Her Destructive Power**

Throughout Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë consistently formulates the rationale that affirms the Victorian gender constraints, in which women are described to be dependent on men and this dependency is portrayed as the relationship between the object and its owner. However, at the same time, Brontë invariably brings her orphan heroine into conflict with a male character, and compels Jane to produce violations of and resistances to conventional gender ideology. Then, through her heroine’s repetitive resistance, she destroys the model of that ideology. Accordingly, the reason why Brontë produces representations of gender ideology, is not to confirm the validity of gender norms, but to disprove them by tearing them down. Jane is therefore empowered to formulate her own ideas and to develop her own kind of femininity, which is sure to challenge Victorian conventions. In this way, Brontë achieves her ultimate goal of challenging the validity of gender ideology.

In the opening chapter, Brontë establishes her first model of male dominance in her depiction of John Reed’s interference with Jane’s reading experience. Then, by letting Jane avow her radical opposition to John, Brontë crushes this model. When John
discovers Jane, her reading is interrupted; she goes out of the window-seat immediately due to her fear of his physical abuse. Seated in an armchair in front of her, John forces her to call him “Master Reed”, defining his relation to his cousin as the master to servant. Then he subjects her to physical abuses. He commands Jane to approach and stand before him, and strikes her suddenly and strongly when she comes up to his chair. John imposes punishment on Jane, as he says, for her “sneaking way of getting behind curtains, and for the look [she has] in [her] eyes” (13). For Bellis, John vents his rage on Jane who attempts to assert “visual independence,” which is something that a dependent female orphan must not have (Bellis 641). Next, he scolds Jane for her crime of reading his book:

“You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent … you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg … Now I’ll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years.” (Jane Eyre 13 emphases added)

Here, we see John claiming his ownership of all the Gateshead Hall as well as his dominance over Jane. As Jane Kromm argues, Brontë formulates a rationale that presents women’s looking and reading as “the threat to male cultural hegemony” (Kromm 371) Though John does not treasure the book, he regards it as his property. He is thus reporting two crimes that Jane carries out: first, her hiding is the resistance to his command, next, her reading is the infringement of his proprietary right. And it is clear that Jane threatens to erode their relation of dominance and subordination. This is why he uses the book as a tool for the purpose of punishment: he is willing to “damage or destroy [his] cultural property in order to shore up [his] proprietary right over the girl’s looking” (371).
Therefore, John aims the book at Jane, as the punishment for her transgression against his intellectual privilege. The book literally knocks her down and makes her head bleed.

At first, Jane reacts in passive obedience to his blow and insult, for she can make no appeal against him. While Jane is subjected to regular abuse, everyone else in the household appears to be John’s accomplice and is made blind to her sufferings. On the one hand, such unkind treatment makes her grow accustomed to her subordinate position; on the other hand, it leads to the accumulation of her repressed anger. In this case, Bewick’s book, once being a shelter for Jane and now becoming John’s weapon, acts as the catalyst to stir up Jane’s rebellion against the heir of the family, and on a larger scale, against the patriarchal system. Jane openly defies John, comparing this “wicked and cruel boy” to the murderer, the slave-driver, and the Roman emperor like Nero and Caligula (Jane Eyre 13). Whereas this comparison is meant to criticize his cruelty and violence, it simultaneously puts her in the place of the victim, the slave, and the subordinate under his ruling.

It is notable that, at this time male dominance still exerts a considerable influence on Jane. She herself is surprised by her resistance: “I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud” (13). Here we see Jane acquiring the ability to generate her own ideas and make her own judgment about the male ruling class. These abilities are considered improper for Victorian women, but they serve to be the first step in Jane’s liberation from enslavement in both Gateshead Hall and the patriarchal society. Then, after her declaration, she puts her idea into action. She engenders a different reaction to John’s violence and literally gets involved in a fight with him. Although the fight is stopped by adults’ intervention and Jane is punished for it by
being kept in confinement to the red room, it marks another crucial turning point in her development. In this confrontation, her rebellious nature is completely revealed. Jane is no longer the obedient orphan girl that can be isolated within the household. Her anger and rebellion pose potential threats to both the domestic sphere of the Reed family and the larger Victorian society, and thus, she must be expelled.

Additionally, throughout her confrontation with John Reed, Jane is constructed as the nonhuman animal by him. When he thinks she goes out into the rain, she is called the “bad animal” because she is perfectly possible to separate herself from the domestic sphere and runs into the natural world (11). She is the “rat” when she attempts to hide herself in order to get out of the control of male dominance. She is, again, the “rat” when she starts a furious fight with the male master (14). While this dehumanization of Jane does indicate her subordinate status, which appears even lower than the servants, the construction of her as animal strongly emphasizes her rebellious nature that differentiates her from the normal Victorians. In this way, as a nonhuman animal, she is unable to be assimilated into the Reed family because of the absolute difference she embodies.

In Laura Peters’s book *Orphan Texts*, the orphan condition is compared with the *pharmakon*. Victorian orphans undergo the similar process: first threatening the house as the alien intruder, then being expelled to help the family carry out a full restoration. In the light of Peters ideas, the orphan figure has a pharmaceutical function: he or she embodies the “dangerous supplement” to be expelled from the family, and this expulsion assists in reinforcing the notions of family stability. However, since Peters primarily focuses on male orphans and orphans with possible non-English origins, her theory seems not at work in this case. Back to our novel, the orphan girl Jane does not go through the process
of phramakon. As an outlier and intruder, her entrance into the Reed family does bring about potential danger to its stability. When she starts to put up opposition to John, the heir of Reed family, she becomes extremely threatening for transgressing male privileges and challenging patriarchal authority. To reassure the stability of the domestic sphere, the family needs to expel Jane, but the whole family has not been healed but is destroyed by the expulsion. Indeed, when Jane later visits Gateshead Hall, every member has degenerated. It can be argued that if the Reeds had retained Jane to execute the new order she established, they could have been saved. Therefore, it becomes clear that the power of the female orphan is not merely threatening, but highly destructive. Her aim is not only to warn the domestic stability, but also to seek the ruin of the patriarchal structure.

The Female Orphan as the Undisciplined Spirit

Critics have frequently focused on Lowood school and its influence on Jane’s progress. M Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar summarize Jane’s study at Lowood Institution as such: “Mr. Brocklehurst has come with news of hell to remove Jane to the aptly named school of life where orphan girls are starved and frozen into proper Christian submission” (Gilbert and Gubar 344). While in Gateshead Hall Jane lacks mental care, she does not experience material scarcity. In Lowood, she is, quite literally, starved and frozen, living in similar conditions to street urchins. In this way, Jane becomes aware of the necessity to accommodate to the world dominated by patriarchal order. Clearly, Lowood instills the concept of submission into the girls’ minds, not only through the exposure of the orphan conditions, but also through harsh disciplines and surveillance. At Lowood, Jane is provided with the opportunity to learn about conventional feminine
values. As Gilbert and Gubar claim, the charity school offers Jane “a valley of refuge,” and “a chance to learn to govern her anger,” which is strictly forbidden for the danger it embodies. She learns to repress her anger through perfect models of Victorian femininity, namely, Miss Temple and Helen Burns, both in some ways appear to be mothers for Jane, “comforting her, counseling her, feeding her, embracing her” (346). Hence, the study at Lowood also marks another crux of Jane’s development: her knowledge about conventions assists her better in hiding her unconventionality.

Helen Burns resembles Jane in their similar condition: both being poor orphan girls. What differentiates her from Jane is that she embodies the ideal femininity of forbearance and self-renunciation. For her, one’s duty is not to struggle against, but to suffer the injustice of life: “It is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what it is your fate to be required to bear.” (Jane Eyre 66) Although it is obvious that Jane disagrees with her and refuses to accept the fate of forbearance, it is from Helen that Jane becomes aware of the orphan condition at her time, and thus recognizes the importance of concealing her rebellious nature. In addition to repressing her dangerous passion, Jane learns about feminine conduct from Miss Temple, as the narrator tells us:

I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits; more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character. (104)

In this passage, Jane is thrown into confusion. While she admires Miss Temple, she hesitates accepting her values. Jane’s constant use of words like “seemed” and
“appeared” indicate that the fact is just the reverse of her words: she does not consider it better to regulate her feelings. Whereas she attempts to persuade herself to accept the “more harmonious thoughts” she learns from Miss Temple, she does not feel contented in doing so. Jane does not lose the ability she gains from her orphan experience to make her own judgment. Receiving education about conventional values and proper conduct does not make her “disciplined” and “subdued.” Instead, she does not believe that those values are correct, which shows her resistance against the conventions. She learns to accommodate herself to the school life by governing her anger, but she never represses her rebellious nature. Miss Temple’s departure from Lowood to the confinement of the domestic sphere greatly alarms Jane, she is afraid of being placed in the similar situation to Miss Temple’s. Therefore, on the evening of Miss Temple’s departure, Jane returns to her unconventionality, becoming the rebellious orphan at Gateshead Hall again:

> From the day she left I was no longer the same: with her was gone every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me.... in the interval I had undergone a transforming process, my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple… and now I was left in my natural element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions. (105)

At this time, Jane’s words become much more confident. She admits that she is fed up with the repression of feelings, and decide on a change. After making her declaration of “I desired liberty,” Jane puts her words into action. She immediately publishes an advertisement on newspaper for a job as a governess, which she later gains at Thornfield, and she soon gets rid of the restrictions imposed in Lowood. However, since Victorian
women were not allowed to achieve status from employment, her attempt to gain autonomy is foiled. Again, Jane becomes entrapped into another confinement during her stay at Thornfield. When she falls in love with Rochester, her master, she is brought into the conflict between femaleness and femininity.

**Rochester, Not the Wrong Man**

In the romantic plot, Charlotte Brontë, once again, constructs a model of Victorian gender hierarchy. Before Rochester ultimately acknowledges that he is dependent on Jane, he makes repeated attempt to exert his dominance over her. For instance, when he tries to dress Jane up in a manner befitting his wife, he disregards her feeling. Apparently, Jane is tortured by the feeling of “being dressed like a doll,” but Rochester looks satisfied with his arrangement. As Gilbert and Gubar claim, in their “whirlwind romance,” Jane begins to see that, “married and dependent, she endangers her freedom, her integrity, and the inner self that originally attracted him” (Gilbert and Gubar 161). As they argue, “even the equality of love between true minds leads to inequalities and minor despotisms of marriage,” the unequal positions of Jane and Rochester in their relationship nevertheless result in more problems (161).

At this time, their romance leads to more than inequality; it makes her enslaved by the patriarchal order again. Jane is clearly aware of this recurring enslavement: “He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched” (*Jane Eyre* 309 emphasis added). She puts up resistance against this enslavement, telling him not to look her in that way. However, her resistance breaks down when he goes on to compare her to “the Grand
Turk’s whole seraglio,” and also regards her job as a governess as “slavery” (310). As the rebel, Jane has been struggling to free herself from the patriarchal system from her childhood. For her, neither the subordinate position nor the economic dependence in marriage can be considered tolerable. In her famous confession, she declares her demand for, at least, emotional equality: “Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you, -- and full as much heart! ...it is my spirit that address your spirit…and we stood at God’s feet, equal, -- as we are!” (292). To her disappointment, Rochester never attempts to relinquish his authority over her: when their wedding is abrogated, he even asks Jane to be his mistress. The fact that Rochester does not pay regard to her demand prophesies their inevitable breakup. Hence, the exposure of Bertha Manson Rochester, his mad wife, serves only as the catalyst to accelerate their separation.

In Nancy Armstrong’s essay “Gender and the Victorian Novel,” she underlines the fact that “Victorian fiction so often positions its heroines to choose the wrong man” (Armstrong 104 emphasis added). According to her ideas, masculine competition can be broken down into two phases: in the first phase, men compete against each other for food supply and authority, and in the second, for women. Armstrong then argues that, in the feminine phase, women are empowered “to exercise ‘taste and refinement’ and so choose a man who has not only proved his brute ability to survive but has also struck them as a pleasant partner” (Armstrong 103). In this way, “the wrong man” here stands for those who ought not to win the masculine competition or charm women. Armstrong ascribes this fact to the failure of middle-class masculinity: what is wrong with the heroine’s chosen mate is that he fails to display the competitive and attractive masculinity, and this
further poses threats to Victorian gender ideology. For Armstrong, *Jane Eyre* inevitably proves this fact:¹ Jane rejects all candidates who “could by any stretch of the imagination belong to the modern middle class,” and ultimately chooses Rochester, the wrong man, “whom the novel cuts down to size and the heroine rehabilitates for a modern household” (Armstrong 104). In addition, Jane’s rehabilitation entails the feminization of Rochester: rather than asserting his dominance over her, he claims his dependence on her. His dependence, as Armstrong argues, is for “the ‘taste and refinement’ appropriate to [his] social station,” and this is why Jane “must become an heiress” before she can return to Thornfield (Armstrong 107).

While Armstrong is certainly correct that the heroine’s mate is not in conformity to Victorian gender ideology, in our novel, Jane’s selection is not wrong. If we can say that Rochester embodies the failure of middle-class masculinity, we can also say that Jane herself breaks with conventional Victorian femininity. For the reasons Armstrong gives to regard Rochester as the wrong man might him actually be the right man. What Jane finds attractive is Rochester’s instability and weakness, so to speak, his vulnerability makes him even more attractive. Her rebellious character, once being suppressed under the instruction at Lowood Institute, is gradually revealed in her relationship with Rochester. While her rebellion against the gender constraints eventually succeeds, she takes up great struggle for it. In this way, Jane’s inheritance is not meant to benefit Rochester. Instead, it is not Rochester but Jane who needs the money to grant her complete economic autonomy and makes her an independent woman free to choose how she will live her life.

¹ However, before Jane’s escape from Thornfield, and before the exposure of Bertha, Rochester has already appeared to be the right man.
With Jane’s ultimate return to Thornfield, the model of the patriarchal system is totally crushed, for their situations appear to have been reversed. Rochester becomes disabled, suffering the debilitating physical blow and losing his power. Meanwhile, Jane has inherited five thousand pounds from her uncle and becomes wholly independent. At this time, as soon as Jane finds out Rochester at Ferndean, she sees the change in his countenance:

[He] looked desperate and brooding – that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe.

The caged eagle, whose gold-ringned eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson. (Jane Eyre 498)

In the scene of their reunion, Jane consistently describes Rochester as the disabled animal. He is thus deprived of the power he previously held and is placed in a powerless position, which conventionally belongs to the female. The next morning after their reunion, Rochester admits his dependence on her: “all the sunshine I can feel is in her presence” (506). Jane becomes acutely aware of the power reversal in their relationship: “the water stood in my eyes to hear this avowal of his dependence; just as if a royal eagle, chained to a perch, should be forced to entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor” (507). While her comparison is meant to express sympathy for his disability, it is notable that she gives herself an equal status to her former master: a sparrow is only smaller in size than an eagle, it is not in a lower position. In this way, we can argue that Rochester is disabled to become the right man for Jane: only when he is disabled can he disavow his authority and treat Jane with equal respect.
As the result of the power reversal, Jane assumes her role as the keeper and caretaker of her caged bird, who once asserted dominance over her. When she glories in her power, Rochester is also keenly aware of his vulnerability. Describing himself, he places himself in a powerless position: “I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard” (512). Surprisingly, he even voices his fear: “what right would that ruin have to bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness?” (512). In response to his question, Jane says: “you are no ruin… you are green and vigorous… your strength offers [friends] so safe a prop” (512). For her, this answer gives Rochester comfort, yet her ability to pacify him also shows her powerful influence. In addition, as Esther Godfrey notes, Jane skillfully delays uncovering the truth about her rejection of St. John Rivers’s marriage proposal, and her conscious manipulation of the fact further increases her advantage over Rochester (Godfrey 867). In this way, Jane merely tells Rochester a fragment of her story because in so doing, she takes the initiative in their conversation. When he is anxious about her possible love affair and asks: “where there only ladies in the house where you have been?” she refuses to answer and promptly flees from him. Hence, Jane works out a strategy for controlling Rochester, “fretting him out of his melancholy for some time to come” (Jane Eyre 506).

It is doubtless that Jane is satisfied with this power reversal and takes pride in her dominating role, which is traditionally masculine. When Rochester tells her that their marriage is meant to her to “bear with [his] infirmities” and “overlook [his] deficiencies,” Jane professes her deep love for him:
“Which are none, sir, to me. I love you better now, when I can really be
useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you
disdained every part but that of the giver and protector.” (513)

Jane’s love is based on her independence and autonomy. In this sense, Rochester is absolutely not the wrong man for her; his vulnerability, in turn, assists her in rejecting Victorian gender ideology. Thus, she can take on her role as the founder of a new society and creates her own family with Rochester. The ending of this novel is comedic, it witnesses the transformation from one kind of society to another; At Ferndean, the new society crystallizes around Jane, in which the husband’s dependence on his wife resembles the relationship between the subject and its owner. Critics have considered the renewal of Rochester’s sight and power in the final chapter as the weakening of Jane’s power and the return to the patriarchal authority; as Godfrey mentions, the male infant “will carry on his social and economic gender role” (Godfrey 868). Being twenty-years older than Jane, Rochester can never conform to the typical model of conventional male authority. Nevertheless, Charlotte Brontë does not mean to deprive her orphan protagonist of power, neither does she employ this sentimental ending to reassert the patriarchal gender system. When Jane rehabilitates her husband, she reconstructs the gender roles of him and her. In this way, he can never become ideological masculine, and her power can never be denied.
CHAPTER II

Character studies of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* have frequently centered on Heathcliff, defining and redefining his role of the Byronic hero and uncovering his origins and characterization. Fewer criticisms focus on the two Catherines, in particular the second Catherine, though literary critics have recognized that the stories of the two Catherines establish the fundamental structure of the novel’s narrative. For example, Lyn Pykett claims, “the similarities and differences in [the shapes of their lives], form a central strand in the elaborately patterned system of repetitions and differences which make this novel’s structure” (Pykett 87). This chapter proposes to zoom in on the two Catherines, reading both as versions of the rebellious orphan and examine their acts of rebellion. Their rebellion clearly differs from Jane Eyre’s: other than Charlotte Brontë who sets up models of traditional gender ideology to let Jane avow oppositions, Emily Brontë hardly sets up any perfect models of gender conventions in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine Earnshaw demonstrates her rebelliousness in early childhood, and throughout her whole life, she never identifies herself with Victorian middle-class feminine values. Her daughter Cathy, while being generally regarded as the “angel in the house,” follows in an asymmetrical repetition of her mother’s life and stages her own version of rebellion.

**The Emotional Orphan and Her Whip**

The earliest mention of Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* is in Lockwood’s discovery of her room. As Lockwood reads Catherine’s childhood diary, the only part of the novel’s narrative written from her perspective, we are immediately

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2 I will call her daughter Cathy to distinguish from her mother Catherine.
informed that this is a text of rebellion – “H. and I are going to rebel” (*Wuthering Heights* 20). Here, the target for Catherine’s revolution is her “atrocious” brother Hindley, “a detestable substitute” for her father (20), but this is not her initial resistance against patriarchal order. Indeed, Catherine’s life, according to Nelly Dean’s narration, can also be read as a veritable text of rebellion.

Catherine’s initial attempt to rebel against patriarchy can be traced back to the time when she was hardly six-years-old. On the morning of her father Mr. Earnshaw’s departure for Liverpool, he asks his children: “What shall I bring you? You may choose what you like” (36). Since Catherine is able to “ride any horse in the stable,” she names a whip in response (36). Literary critics have frequently looked at this particular scene. For example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in their book that the father’s question requires the two children to express their internal desires: “they reveal their true selves, just as a father contemplating his own ultimate absence from their lives might have hoped they would” (Gilbert and Gubar 263). Catherine’s desire for a whip, thus, stands for “a powerless younger daughter’s yearning for power” (264). It can be argued that the girl’s longing for a whip uncovers her unconventionality and rebelliousness. In a realistic sense, her keen interest in riding is undoubtedly regarded as unfeminine at her time. Symbolically, the whip not only represents male privileges such as strength and power, but also suggests a sadistic inclination to hurt others. Therefore, it is not what she ought to ask for. In spite of the fact that her desire may possibly be satisfied in Mr. Earnshaw’s ultimate absence, at this moment it must be repressed in order to maintain the father’s patriarchal authority.
From this perspective, it is not surprising that the father returns home with neither Hindley’s fiddle nor Catherine’s whip. Instead, he brings what he asks the family to take as “a gift of God” - “a dirty, ragged, black-hair child” later named after his deceased son Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights* 36). Critics have thoroughly discussed Mr. Earnshaw’s introduction of this “gypsy brat” into Wuthering Heights, reading him as, for instance, Catherine’s metaphysical whip (Gilbert and Gubar 264), or a usurper posing threat to the domesticity (Peters 47). Apparently, Heathcliff’s arrival frightens both Mrs. Earnshaw and Nelly, and it also brings about internal dissension within the family. Here, I align my reading with critic Richard Dellamora, who sees Heathcliff as “a means [used by Mr. Earnshaw] of teasing his wife and two children” (Dellamora 537). Dellamora puts forward his argument to discuss Heathcliff’s uncontrollability as a family member that makes him ultimately “a responsibility that Earnshaw proves incapable of fulfilling” (538). However, I would argue that Mr. Earnshaw is not unable, but unwilling to fulfill the responsibility of rearing Heathcliff. He does not mean to have this orphan adopted as his son. Instead, he brings *it* in as the replacement for his children’s presents, for Hindley’s fiddle is “crushed to morsels” and Catherine’s whip is lost (*Wuthering Heights* 37). Hence, Mr. Earnshaw reasserts his absolute authority in the household by refusing to satisfy the younger generation’s desires, neither according his son exclusive privilege, nor granting his daughter power; and it is Heathcliff’s advent that boosts this reassurance. In this sense, Heathcliff enters into Wuthering Heights not to become a family member, but to be a tool for Mr. Earnshaw of controlling the whole family.

This control works at first, and Mr. Earnshaw wields power over his rebellious daughter. Unlike her brother who passively accepts the fact and “blubber[s] aloud,”
Catherine “show[s] her humor by grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing” in a burst of anger at the failure to get her whip (37). But immediately after, she gets “a sound blow” from Mr. Earnshaw “to teach her cleaner manners” (37). While it is possible that Mr. Earnshaw loses his daughter’s whip unintentionally, his decision to introduce Heathcliff into the family is conscious. Accordingly, the physical punishment is, on the one hand, for Catherine’s savage and uncivilized behaviors; on the other hand, for her challenging her father’s decision. By not bringing the daughter a whip, Mr. Earnshaw refuses to grant her power; then, by slapping her face, he quells her rebellion.

Consequently, Catherine seems to pledge obedience to her father and expect favors from him: she quickly establishes friendship with Heathcliff. However, as soon as she realizes that Mr. Earnshaw will never be satisfied with her, she stops ingratiating herself with him. She learns to capture his concern by performing her disobedience, “doing just what her father hate[s] most” (43). While she remains intimate with Heathcliff, this time she is not motivated with the purpose of pleasing her father.

Technically, Catherine is orphaned by the passing of her father Mr. Earnshaw. It is nevertheless true that before the actual deprivation of her parents, she has already been emotionally orphaned. Mr. Earnshaw is estranged from her and expresses his dislike undisguisedly; because, as Nelly Dean tells us, Catherine is believed to be “too mischievous and wayward for a favorite” (38). Her father makes her an emotional orphan, so to speak, because of her rebellious nature. However, neither Mr. Earnshaw nor Nelly realize the fact that Catherine’s mischievousness can be the direct consequence of her lack of domestic education. Victorian expectation of the middle-class daughters, as Claudia Nelson claims in her book, is to “function as domestic centers of morality”
(Nelson 85). The satisfaction of this expectation requires both parents to take their responsibilities seriously: basically, the mother should provide her daughter with the model of ideal feminine qualities of “purity, selflessness and tenderness” (65); and the father ought to be responsible to protect her innocence. However, neither of the Earnshaw parents takes such responsibilities. The untimely death of Catherine’s mother results in the absence of feminine models in the daughter’s early life. Mr. Earnshaw, though regarding his daughter a living reproach, never attempts to give her any instructions. Indeed, he sees her insolence not as “pretended,” but as “real,” and cruelly defines her as incurable (Wuthering Heights 43). It is therefore, Catherine’s negligent parents who deprive her of the opportunity to learn about the established conventions, thus effectively making her an orphan in her own home. Moreover, Mr. Earnshaw’s apathy towards Catherine makes her attempts to correct her mistakes feeble and futile:

“Nay, Cathy,” the old man would say, “I cannot love thee; thou’rt worse than thy brother. Go, say thy prayers, child, and ask God’s pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee!”
That made her cry, at first; and then, being repulsed continually hardened her, and she laughed if I told her to say she was sorry for her faults, and beg to be forgiven. (43)

The last sentence in this passage indicates that Nelly tries to reconcile Catherine with her father but her attempt is foiled. At this time, Catherine is discouraged by the fact that her father completely rejects her, thus she no longer wishes for his favor. Not surprisingly, when Catherine receives a rebuke from Mr. Earnshaw’s last words: “Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?” she asks in reply: “Why cannot you always be a good
man, father?” (43) Her father’s deathbed reproach ensures her inconformity with the daughterly ideal, and her response eliminates the faint possibility to alter her rebellious character into gentle and soft, for she is no longer interested in pretending to be a good daughter. Since then, Catherine has become a factual parentless girl. She has been living like an orphan in the midst of an emotionally hostile family, and now she is literally orphaned.

It is fair to argue that Catherine comes to power when she becomes an orphan. When she is emotionally orphaned, she is in a similar condition to Heathcliff, establishing connection with him and exerting influence on him. Hence, as Nelly tells us, Catherine shows that she “had more power over Heathcliff than [her father’s] kindness: how the boy would do her bidding in anything, and his only when it suited his own inclination” (43 emphases in original). In addition, the key relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff seems to have been determined from the latter’s arrival. Heathcliff enters into the household in place of the gift, thus his relation to Catherine, the master’s daughter, closely resembles the object’s subordination to its owner. As Dellamora claims, the two are “trapped in terms of the master-slave relation” (Dellamora 539). When Heathcliff gets out of control of his previous male master, he is still under the control of Catherine. Indeed, Mr. Earnshaw’s death in turn assists in extending Catherine’s influence on Heathcliff. He soon becomes Catherine’s accomplice to oppose Hindley, the heir of the Earnshaw family. These two orphans, regardless of Hindley’s tyranny, “work and play… in the fields” and “grow up as rude as savages” (Wuthering Heights 46). Catherine’s wandering in the natural world certainly arouses and intensifies
her unruliness, and under this circumstance she has her first encounter with the Linton family, a more conventionally domestic and patriarchal household.

Catherine’s Threat and the Failure of Her Rebellion

Out of curiosity about the Linton’s domestic life, Catherine initiates her adventure towards Thrushcross Grange with Heathcliff. “[Running] from the top of the Heights to the park, without stopping,” Catherine loses both her shoes and the race (48). The loss of the race more or less prophesies her subsequent failure to flee from the Grange. When Catherine and Heathcliff look in at the window, they are mistaken for thieves and are driven out of the Grange by a male bull-dog, the protector of that patriarchal domesticity which injures her, an outlier. Catherine’s escape is foiled, she literally falls down and is bitten by the bull-dog. Her immediate action is not to cry but to ask Heathcliff to run away. On the one hand, her bravery demonstrates an unwomanly strong character, on the other, her command foretells the two orphans’ ultimate separation and her entanglement with the Linton family. As Steve Lukits claims, Catherine’s first stay at the Grange predicts her eventual return “to become Mrs. Linton, a lady, wife, mother-to-be” (Lukits 109).

The five-week stay at Thrushcross Grange, which proves to be the turning point of Catherine’s development, brings her a sudden and dramatic transformation. Since then, the conflict between her untamed nature and the traditional expectations arises and is never calmed down. During Catherine’s stay, Mrs. Linton takes the role of her mother (and later becomes her mother-in-law), and teaches her rules to fulfill the Victorian expectations of femininity. In result, when Catherine comes back to Wuthering Heights,
her manner is said by Nelly to be dramatically improved. She is transfigured from the “wild, hatless little savage” into “a very dignified person with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver” (*Wuthering Heights* 53). However, as Nelly tells us, this transformation is ephemeral:

Cathy, catching a glimpse of her friend in his concealment, flew to embrace him; she bestowed seven or eight kisses on his cheek within the second, and, then, stopped, and drawing back, burst into a laugh… (54)
The existence of Heathcliff, Catherine’s orphan companion, suddenly reminds her of her rebelliousness. While he is invisible in concealment, she has no difficulty perceiving him, which proves that her rebellious nature weighs more heavily with her at this moment. Therefore, within seconds, the docile ladylike girl has turned back into the wild unwomanly child. Catherine, quite literally, is running away from the manners she has adopted from Mrs. Linton, her feminine model. Mrs. Linton’s attempt to discipline the orphan girl has failed, and Nelly’s narration goes on to reveal that Catherine can never be assimilated to Victorian culture. Her association with the Linton family familiarizes herself with social expectations of women. Nevertheless, rather than being disciplined to live up with those standards, she quickly learns instead to only conceal her unconventionality. The longer time she stays in the Grange, the more able she is to masquerade as a lady and simultaneously remains untamed. In Nelly’s words, Catherine develops a “double character” perfectly:

In the place where she heard Heathcliff termed a “vulgar young ruffian,” and ‘worse than a brute,’ she took care not to act like him; but at home she had small inclination to practice politeness that would only be laughed at,
and restrain an unruly nature when it would bring her neither credit, nor praise. (67)

Her “unruly nature” comes from being orphaned. At this time, the double character does not lead Catherine to flounder about in the patriarchal society, but makes her “the queen of the countryside; she had no peer” (68). However, as she develops as a feigned lady, she finds it more difficult to refuse to be assimilated into the conventional system. Her inner struggle between her rebellious nature and the feminine expectations becomes more violent. In this way, her efforts to define herself as a conventional woman makes her mad.

While Catherine does not carry out what Laura Peters calls the “pharmaceutical function” (Peters 22), she does embody the “dangerous supplement” which threatens Thrushcross Grange, the family she enters as an orphan. Catherine for the Linton family resembles Jane Eyre for the Reed family, both are outsiders and alien intruders. What makes them different is that the Reeds exclude Jane for the danger she represents, but the Lintons welcome Catherine and remain unaware of her potential threat. Both Mr. and Mrs. Linton treat her as their daughter, but their attempts to incorporate this outlier produces a deleterious effect. When Mrs. Linton brings the convalescent Catherine to the Grange, she brings in the virus that literally infects and ultimately kills both her and her husband. However, the disruptive influence of this virus does not disappear after the death of the Linton parents. With the arrival of Catherine, the moral influence of Linton parents diminishes; and Isabella Linton, once being a proper Victorian daughter, immediately falls into the category of the rebellious orphan.³ In the rest of her story,

³ For analysis of Isabella’s character, her narrative, and the issue of domestic violence, see
Isabella makes conscious efforts to defy the patriarchal order: she first escapes from her brother, then from her husband. It can be argued that her elopement with Heathcliff is inspired more by Catherine’s destructive power than Heathcliff’s sexual power. Therefore, when she discovers that Heathcliff is not an ideal husband, she does not yield to him, but runs away. It is notable that Isabella does not lose her adherence to gender ideology completely. Unlike Catherine who aims to overturn the patriarchal order, Isabella resists one authority in order to submit to another. Namely, she breaks free from Edgar only to be Heathcliff’s wife, and she leaves Heathcliff to be an ideal mother for her son. Isabella is destined for death, not because she raises rebellion, but because her rebellion remains superficial.

In addition to Isabella, Edgar Linton, the heir of the Linton family, is also infected by the outlier. Indeed, Catherine has a more powerful influence on Edgar than other Linton members. He is attracted to and infatuated with her almost immediately after her arrival at Thrushcross Grange. While being raised up in a traditionally patriarchal household, Edgar does not put himself above Catherine in the hierarchy. Instead, he submits himself to her. The hierarchal reversion of gender conventions between the two is believed to be confirmed in a quarrel, in which Edgar discovers Catherine’s “genuine disposition” \((\textit{Wuthering Heights} 72)\). Edgar is shocked by both her falsehood and

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Judith E. Pike’s article “‘My name was Isabella Linton’: Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs. Heathcliff’s Narrative in \textit{Wuthering Heights}.”

4 This is why her son Linton Heathcliff is unfit for survival but Cathy appears to be the fittest, though they both are the children of the rebellious orphan. While Juliet McMaster argues that Linton’s early death is because he “is the bad seed, the degenerate offspring” who “combin[es] the worst characteristics of both his parents,” it clearly has something to do with his mother’s invalid resistance (McMaster 1). For more analysis of Linton Heathcliff and his marriage to Cathy, see McMaster’s article “The Courtship and Honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Linton Heathcliff: Emily Brontë’s Sexual Imagery.”
violence, and becomes irritated when she deliberately smacks him in their dispute. For Nelly, it is opportune to break off their unequal relationship, but to her astonishment, Edgar neither breaks up with Catherine nor has this occasion to establish his authority; he does not even leave the court. Nelly’s comment shows how she, as well as the Victorian conventions, despises Edgar’s unmanly behavior:

The soft thing … he possessed the power to depart, as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half killed, or a bird half eaten – Ah, I thought, there will be no saving him – He’s doomed, and flies to his fate! (72-73).

From then on, Edgar has grown accustomed to being compliant and subordinate to Catherine. Catherine remains dominant over her male companion: the power she seized after her father’s death still rests with her. This power first comes to her when she is emotionally orphaned. Then she becomes a factual orphan and has to defend herself from Hindley, who becomes increasingly cruel. Without the support of father or mother, literally, she must learn to dominate her companion and to resist her brother. In this way, Edgar’s surrender to Catherine reinforces her power. Then, when they get married, Edgar relinquishes the authority of the household. He tacitly approves Catherine’s destruction of the gender conventions set up in the Grange and becomes her accomplice. Nelly describes the power dynamics in their marriage as follows:

I observed that Mr. Edgar had a deep-rooted fear of ruffling her humor. He concealed it from her; but if ever he heard me answer sharply, or saw any other servant grow cloudy at some imperious order of hers, he would show
his trouble by a frown of displeasure that never darkened on his own account. (92)

Nelly goes on to describe Catherine’s “seasons of gloom and silence,” and how Edgar “respect[s] [them] with sympathizing silence” (101). The inverted husband-wife binary absolutely challenges Victorian gender ideology in which the privilege of the husband is insisted upon and the wife’s duty is to “complete, sweeten, and embellish the existence of [her husband and children]” (Poovey 1). Apparently, Catherine can never match the expectations for an ideal wife, and it is her refusal to comply that leads their marriage, as well as herself, to devastating consequences. As the virus, she must be inactivated and expelled to ensure the stability of the domestic sphere and larger Victorian society.

Not only does Catherine’s marriage make her more incompatible with the social system; but also it revokes the privilege she enjoys from childhood – her dominant position. While marrying Edgar appears a safe choice for Catherine, it is also notable that when she informs Nelly of her decision, she claims that her marriage is to “aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of [her] brother’s control” “with [her] husband’s money” (Wuthering Heights 82). In other words, as the orphaned sister in the Earnshaw household, she does not have money to help Heathcliff out. As such, the married Catherine parallels with little Jane Eyre, and her lack of economic autonomy should have assigned her a vulnerable status in her marriage. Edgar’s bourgeois status in material reality requires Catherine to repress her rebellious nature, which makes it more difficult for her to retain emotional dominance over her husband. What’s worse, when Heathcliff, her childhood companion and subordinate, comes back to the Heights, he establishes economic and social independence as a gentleman. Because of social restraints on
women, Heathcliff’s approach to gain autonomy does not work for Catherine. The two orphans’ economic positions alter, and hence their previous master-slave relation becomes troubled. Her rebellious nature brings her into conflict with social expectations. She is gradually torn apart, as Joseph Carroll has claimed, by “the unresolvable conflict between her childhood fixation and her adult marital relation” (Carroll 253). And, when Heathcliff and Edgar fight, she becomes debilitating and is deemed unable to recognize herself in the mirror:

“Don’t you see that face?” she enquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror. …

“It’s behind there still! … And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I’m afraid of being alone!”

…a succession of shudders convulsed her frame, and she would keep straining her gaze towards the glass.

… “There’s nobody here!” I insisted. “It was yourself, Mrs Linton; you knew it a while since.” (Wuthering Heights 123)

When Catherine directs a gaze on the reflection in the mirror, she faces a desperate struggle to identify herself but eventually fails to recognize who she is. Because at this time, she finds herself unable to either preserve her nature or conform to culture. The fear of herself haunts her and leads her to madness. Her rebellion begun in her childhood is bound to fail, and Catherine as the rebel must be eliminated. Her demise does good to her, though, because her death frees herself from the endless struggle between femaleness and femininity. Likewise, since she dies in childbirth, she is not required to be a mother, to negotiate “that other profoundly ideological version of womanhood” (Pykett 93).
Additionally, by killing herself, her fear of independence of both Edgar and Heathcliff subsides. The final scene of “three head-stones on the slope next the moor” represents the reunion of the three (*Wuthering Heights* 337). Catherine loses neither of the two men, nor does she lose her dominance over them.

**Cathy: Her Mother’s Repetition**

Literary critics have shown particular interest in the parallel between Catherine and her daughter: Cathy has been regarded as her mother’s “non-identical double” (Gilbert and Gubar 298), and her life as Catherine’s “asymmetrical repetition” (Pykett 87). Critics have always tended not to zoom in on Cathy’s similarities with Catherine, but to read her as her mother’s variation. Unlike Catherine who is the neglected wild child, Cathy is the “angel in the house,” the “culture’s child,” who promises to become an ideal Victorian woman to eliminate her mother’s originality and to compromise with the rules of domesticity (Gilbert and Gubar 299; Lukits 115). However, since Cathy begins her life and grows up without a mother, she is half way to the condition of orphanhood. It is fair to read Cathy as the rebellious orphan who inherits her mother’s blood and becomes as rebellious as she is.

In Nelly Dean’s depiction, the young Cathy seems not to resemble her mother: “she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice, and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce; it was deep and tender” (*Wuthering Heights* 189). Being a dutiful daughter under the protection and control of her father Edgar Linton, Cathy receives education entirely from him, being his “apt scholar” (189); and she is strictly confined to Thrushcross Grange: “Till she reached the age of
thirteen, she had not once been beyond the range of the park by herself” (190). Nelly describes the obedient girl as “a perfect recluse” who is “apparently, perfectly contented” (190); yet Nelly later finds out that, she is not. Rather than “a born lady” (Gilbert and Gubar 299), Cathy is indeed a made lady through her father’s education and governance. She does inherit her mother’s rebellious blood, and resembles Catherine in the way she rebels – releasing herself from the domestic confinement and going outside the limits of her world. Like her mother, Cathy experiences her family of origin as imprisoning. Therefore, when Edgar leaves the Grange to take his nephew Linton Heathcliff back and when Nelly becomes negligent in her care, Cathy secretly leaves the Grange on her own. Her first encounter with Wuthering Heights, same as her mother’s with the Grange, is the result of the desire for freedom driven by her curiosity about a different world.

Whereas her mother comes to the Grange to be temporarily disciplined, Cathy leaves her childhood home to launch her rebellion. Since her first contact with the Heights, she is no longer the obedient daughter and begins to go beyond the control of her father. When Nelly discovers Cathy’s clandestine meetings with Linton Heathcliff and scolds her, Cathy defends herself: “The Grange is not a prison, Ellen, and you are not my jailer. And besides, I’m almost seventeen. I’m a woman” (Wuthering Heights 242). Critics have noticed that Cathy’s movement from the Grange to the Heights is associated with her alienation from her childhood home and the disciplines she accepts in her girlhood. For example, Drew Lamonica sees Cathy’s claim to be a woman as her longing for an “enlarged identity that promises freedom and agency” (Lamonica 107); and this desire makes her incompatible with the domestic and patriarchal household she dwells in. As the result, Edgar’s influence on his daughter diminishes.
Cathy rebels against her father by keeping him ignorant of both her exceeding beyond the physical boundary, her night ride across moors to the Heights, and her violation of feminine standards of behavior, say, her secret relationship with Edgar Linton. When Cathy is imprisoned by Heathcliff and is manipulated to marry his son Linton Heathcliff, she is completely beyond the control of her father, which leads to his imminent demise. Then what Gilbert and Gubar calls Cathy’s “most notable adventure” occurs, she runs away from Wuthering Heights to “go back to her father” (Gilbert and Gubar 299). She does not, however, return to the world of her father. She goes back to her childhood home, witnessing her father’s death and the estate transfer. By his death, Cathy not only is literally orphaned, but also breaks up with the domestic household in which she is brought up. When she returns back to the Heights as a newly-married wife, she becomes inevitably and completely rebellious, transforming from a dutiful daughter to a disobedient woman.

In Wuthering Heights, Cathy appears to be the victimized orphan. She is imprisoned in the house and suffers both physical and emotional abuse. But at this time, she refuses to perform the domestic feminine role, either as a submissive housewife, or as an obedient daughter-in-law. She resists mental enslavement, and openly defies Heathcliff, her father-in-law and the master of the family. Lockwood gives an account of the exchange between Heathcliff and Cathy in his narrative, in which Heathcliff fiercely calls Cathy “worthless” and commands:

“There you are at your idle tricks again! The rest of them do earn their bread – you live on my charity! Put your trash away, and find something
to do. You shall pay me for the plague of having you eternally in my sight – do you hear, damnable jade?”

“I’ll put my trash away, because you can make me, if I refuse,” answered the young lady, closing the book and throwing it on a chair, “but I’ll not do anything, though you should swear your tongue out, except what I please!” (Wuthering Heights 30)

Then she keeps her word by “playing the part of a statue,” staging a silent protest (30). In addition, Cathy also empowers herself to resist the adverse circumstances by practicing the “black art.” According to Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis, Cathy is merely impersonating a witch. Her real function is not to threaten culture, but to “serve it,” to “mediate between nature and culture” (Gilbert and Gubar 300) While they are certainly correct that the black art Cathy practices is bookish and unauthentic, it is also true that her disguise as a witch does assist her to scare away Joseph, the male servant who has been serving the family for long and has always bowed to his male master. He dares to scold Catherine and boxes her ears when she opposes Hindley (Wuthering Heights 21). But when he attempts to crush Cathy’s resistance, instead of inflicting violence on her, he “tremble[s] with sincere horror [of her curse], hurrrie[s] out praying and ejaculating ‘wicked’ as he [goes]” (15). It is obvious that he considers Cathy’s transgressive female power more threatening than her mother’s. In this sense, Cathy threatens the family as well as Victorian culture to the same extent, if not more, as her mother does.

What makes Cathy escape from the tragic fate which her mother suffers is that she is endowed with the opportunity to rehabilitate Hareton, the heir of the Earnshaw family. Critics have always regard the ending of this novel as the restoration of Victorian
ideology. For example, Pykett argues that “the second generation story …appears to move from Gothic beginnings… to the conventional closure of a dominant form of the Victorian Domestic novel, in which the hero (Hareton) and the heroine (Catherine) overcome the obstacles of an obstructive society and withdraw into a private real of domesticity” (Pykett 76). In this way, Cathy teaches Hareton literacy is only to move him “away from nature and towards culture” (Gilbert and Gubar 301); and their ultimate return to Thrusscross Grange, the ordinary world, domestically compromised Cathy’s rebellion (Lukits 115; Lamonica 117). Here I would align my reading with critics like N. M. Jacobs who sees “an under-world or other-world… latent in the structures of the comfortable reality” (Jacobs 217). Cathy’s cultivation of Hareton does not reverse her relationship with Hareton, but further exercises her control over him. At the time she rehabilitates Hareton, Heathcliff has passed away, and she gains control of her own life. She does not return to take the role of feminine gentility, but constructs a new role for herself. Therefore, the rehabilitation of the future master does not reverse their relationship, but further exercises her control over him. In addition, the lovers’ journey back to the Grange is directed by Cathy, who is leading her future husband to “the house of her ancestors” (Wuthering Heights 259 emphasis added). The closure of the novel certainly quells the domestic violence, but it does not lead the younger generation back to Victorian ideal domesticity. Cathy’s rebellion ends in a victory: she succeeds in defining herself as an unconventional woman. The newly-married couple get rid of the violent governance of their fathers and ultimately live in companionate domestic peace.
Two Catherines: Two Phases of Orphan Narrative

Literary critics have discussed the dual function of the literary orphan: Nina Auerbach has considered the orphan as both the transformer of social structure and the destroyer of civilization. Laura Peters has defined the orphan as the pharmakon, being both the threat and the cure for her surrogate family (Peters 22). Based on Auerbach’s argument, Sarah Gilead classifies the Victorian orphan novel under “liminal” and develops her argument of two phases of the orphan narrative:

“First, the [orphan]’s relation to society and to a seemingly vitiated cultural heritage is restored by means of crises of negation, alienation, and self-confrontation; … second, [the orphan narratives] are designed as a culture-regenerating force in a bereft, conflicted society.” (Gilead 303)

The orphan figure performs the role of the destructor and regenerator, breaking with old conventions and then encouraging a newly-formed social and cultural order. If we take Catherine and Cathy as a composite whole, they strongly embody this kind of orphan figure, and the novel Wuthering Heights is thus a paradigmatic orphan narrative.

Catherine’s life begins the phase of destruction. She reveals her rebellious nature early in her childhood, and thus is rejected and alienated by her father. Her factual orphanhood empowers her to run away from the Victorian ideal, but on her way of escape, she is entrapped. In the latter half of her life she is brought into self-confrontation, and her failure to legitimize her unconventionality in the conventional society leads her to madness and eventual demise. By Catherine’s passing, the novel enters into the second phase of the orphan narrative, and Cathy’s life goes through the phase of regeneration. Since she has been raised up by her father and has received decent
education from him, she acquires an intimate knowledge of conventional standards, which makes her rebellion easier than that of her aimless mother. At the end of her story, Cathy utilizes her knowledge to cultivate her future husband. Lockwood gives a description of the teaching scene when he returns to the Heights after Heathcliff’s death. At this time, Hareton already retrieves his position, “respectably dressed” like a gentleman (*Wuthering Heights* 307). But the fact that he mistakes the pronunciation of “contrary” “for the third time” and that “his eyes kept impatiently wandering from the page to a small white hand over his shoulder” suggest that he is still uncivilized (307). It seems that his aim of learning is not to acquire literacy, but to capture attention of Cathy. This scene demonstrates great dependency of Hareton on his future wife. It thus can be argued that gender roles of Hareton and Cathy are reconstructed, and he is not to be rehabilitated to become ideological masculine. In this way, a new form of domesticity generates, and the rebellious female orphan achieves success in destroying her old house of patriarchy and creates her new family.
CHAPTER III

Many literary critics believe that Esther Summerson can be viewed as Charles Dickens’s response to Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre. For instance, Olga Stucheberukhov notes that both Esther and Jane begin as orphans, and both narratives end with the ultimate validation of “their subjectivity through the patriarchal norms of family” (Stucheberukhov 157). Stucheberukhov sees the female orphans as the outliers who must “internaliz[e] the norms of middle-class respectability through the power of self-discipline and by subjugating their sexuality to reason and duty” in order to reach personal and economic success (157). Apparently, Stucheberukhov regards neither Jane nor Esther as a rebellious character even though she takes notice of Jane’s initial rebellion against traditional female submissiveness. Likewise, critics have been frequently in disregard of Esther’s rebelliousness. They have tended to read her as “a sign of the feminine,” the perfect portrait of an ideal Victorian woman who becomes “the very embodiment of hegemony as the subject’s willing submission to ideology” (Danahay 425). However, in this chapter, I would argue against these critical readings and instead assign Esther and Jane into the same category: the rebellious orphan. While Esther seems not as rebellious as Jane is, she does raise her rebellion, not through direct confrontation with the patriarchal authority, but through her implicit resistance against traditional feminine ideology. And, similar to the female orphans discussed in the previous two chapters, Esther ultimately departs from the old house of patriarchy, creates her new family and establishes a new order.
Not the Mimic Orphan

What differentiates Esther Summerson from Jane Eyre and the Catherine of *Wuthering Heights* is that Esther is on a parallel with the street orphan. Despite the fact that Jane is kept isolated from the Reed kids and Catherine is emotionally orphaned by her father, both of the girls are considered, more or less, as the member of their (foster) families. Esther, however, never seems to be integrated into her foster family, which is indeed not much of a family at all. Esther’s godmother Miss Barbary, who turns out to be her aunt, keeps her blood relation to Esther secret in her lifetime. Esther is treated with complete indifference during her stay at Windsor, and she clearly experiences deeper fear of rejection and abandonment than Jane and Catherine do. In this way, it is imperative that Esther should spare no efforts to find a place in the household and accommodate herself to it. As Hochman and Wachs argue, *Bleak House* presents “a strenuous struggle [in Esther] to achieve a normative middle-class identity,”, and Esther herself “must wage [the magnitude of the struggle] to organize a self that finds a place in the world by exercising its own powers of control” (Hochman and Wachs 21, 86). This is the reason why literary critics have tended to read Esther as the mimic, who is longing for and ultimately succeeds in being included in Victorian society. However, it can be argued that Esther’s first-person narrative portrays her struggle as painful: clearly, she is not free to choose, but enforced to adapt herself to patriarchal orders.

While from the very beginning of her narrative Esther appears to have accepted the values by which she finds herself “poor” and “trifling” (Dickens 28), she clearly is not born with these negative values, but learns about them during her stay at Miss Barbary’s house. The earliest reference to this learning process can be discovered in
Esther’s depiction of her birthday story, in which Miss Barbary asks her to adhere to the principles of “submission, self-denial, diligent work” (30). One can argue that Esther starts to abase herself at Miss Barbary’s command, and much has been made of Esther as a groveling character who lacks independent judgment and always caters the needs of other characters. However, it is notable that Esther does not carry out Miss Barbary’s command at once. On that birthday, “the most melancholy day at home, in the whole year,” Miss Barbary continues to mete out unkind treatment to Esther (29). Instead of celebrating the girl’s birthday, she tells her: “It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born!” (30). Esther’s immediate response to Miss Barbary’s words displays her independence of mind. She expresses obvious reluctance to accept the reproach on her and in turn asks about her mother: “What did I do to her? How did I lose her? Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault?” (30 emphases added). These questions can be read as the expression of the orphan girl’s fervent wish for mother and maternal love, meantime, they seem to imply her disagreement about Miss Barbary’s accusation. Apparently, Esther is aware that she is different from other girls at the neighboring school because she receives extremely different treatment compared with them. It is nevertheless true that she does not know where this possible difference comes from, and she clearly indicates that she does not count it as her mistake for which she must be punished. Esther’s questions contain her implicit resistance against her godmother’s authority, and by raising these questions, she rebels in an explicit way.

In response to Esther’s questions, Miss Barbary does not – and appears unable to – give a direct answer. Instead, she tells the girl: “Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace,
and you were hers” (30). According to Miss Barbary, this disgrace brings Esther original sin and makes her not only “orphaned” but also “degraded” – she is believed to be naturally set apart and inferior to others (30). In so doing, Miss Barbary attempts to persuade Esther that she deserves to be isolated and that she must obey principles of “submission, self-denial, diligent work” to repair her fault. Miss Barbary’s aim is clear: in order to wield her parental authority over Esther she must crush her resistance. She needs to reinforce the strict disciplines over Esther and instill shame and submissiveness into her to maintain this control. To some extent, Miss Barbary succeeds. Since then, Esther has never raised any questions during her stay at Windsor. Alex Zwerdling mentions in his influential essay “Esther Summerson Rehabilitated” that critics have acknowledged that Miss Barbary’s principles become “the most powerful determinant of [Esther’s] adult personality and life choices” (Zwerdling 430). It seems that the speech exerts so much influence on Esther that she accurately recalls it on subsequent occasions. However, Esther is not meant to follow Miss Barbary’s instruction obediently, she rather suggests to the reader how she disagrees with them.

In fact, the young Esther already shows an unwillingness to form a completely submissive character. When she confides in her doll about the birthday story, she is doubtful of Miss Barbary’s judgment:

I would try, as hard as ever I could, to repair the fault I had been born with (of which I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent), and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contented and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could. (Dickens 31 emphasis added)
It appears obvious that Esther is not under the guidance of Miss Barbary. For Zwerdling, Esther’s instinctual impulse towards her godmother’s speech is “to formulate a strategy for survival” (Zwerdling 430). She works out a less self-destructive formula – “to be industrious, contented and kind-hearted,” in which “an instinct for self-preservation is at work” (430). Zwerdling goes on to argue that Esther is a character “alienated from her true self and unable to acknowledge her deepest feelings” (433). Indeed, the self-preservation strategy is effective for Esther to acknowledge her feelings, and she declares her true self in this passage by claiming “I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent.” Here, the little Esther, not the adult narrator, is instinctively rebelling against what Miss Barbary has said. Though she is told to regard herself as guilty, she cannot stop questioning this accusation and instead thinking that she is innocent. In addition, claiming that she would strive to win some love, Esther shows that she has independence of mind. She distinctly does not take her godmother’s negative values: she chooses not to wait for other’s charity but to make active efforts to obtain some love by herself. Therefore, Esther knows well about her rebellious self; she has to pretend to abandon it because Miss Barbary is eager to break down her resistance. It is also notable that Esther is born outside the social laws, and she herself is the violation of patriarchal order. Miss Barbary is clear about this violation and thus she recognizes Esther as the potential threat to traditional gender ideology. While she imposes severe restrictions upon Esther to minimize the danger she embodies, Miss Barbary tends not to take the maternal responsibilities to provide the girl with daily disciplines. Thanks to this negligence, Esther finds the opportunity not to acknowledge her deepest feelings, but to conceal them as well as her unfeminine character.
Dolly and Esther’s Femaleness

According to the adult Esther’s recollection, the doll named Dolly is the only friend who “know[s] very well [about her]” and with whom “[she] felt at ease,” because, as she tells us: “I was such a shy little thing that I seldom dared to open my lips, and never dared to open my heart, to anybody else” (Dickens 27-29). Esther’s doll occupies a pivotal rule in her development, and literary critics have taken particular interest in this doll. They have read it as, for instance, the “substitute for maternal acceptance” (Zwerdling 434), “an imagined being onto whom [Esther] could project feeling” (Hochman and Wachs 90), and the repository of all the girl’s “anxieties about her illegitimate past” (Madsen 416). These critical readings make it clear that the doll contains something that should not be celebrated according to Miss Barbary’s principles. What little Esther tells to the doll is her hidden secret, for example, her reluctance to love her godmother, which indicates that she is not as thankful as she pretends to be. Indeed, the fact that Esther cannot love her godmother shows that she, in early childhood, is already rebelling against the parental authority and refusing to claim emotions she does not experience. In other words, the doll becomes an object carrying the secret about her rebellious character that must not be celebrated by an ideal Victorian woman. Hence, when Esther buries the doll, she is believed by many critics to repress “the unruly impulses” originating from her orphanhood, and compromises with conventional values (Hochman and Wachs 86).

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5 For recent criticisms on Esther’s doll, see Emily Madsen’s 2013 article “Phiz’s Black Doll: Integrating Text and Etching in Bleak House” and Christopher Pittard’s 2016 article “The Travelling Doll Wonder: Dickens, Secular Magic, and Bleak House.”
By burying her doll, Esther seems to renounce her true self and to carry on the struggle for social identification with patriarchal values. Nevertheless, her unconventionality is not eliminated after her six-year stay at Greenleaf School, and her conflict between femaleness and femininity remains unresolved. In fact, whether Esther is the perfect embodiment of Victorian femininity has been a matter for some critical debate. Most critics argue that Esther is constructed as an advocate for femininity and domesticity. Among them, Laurie Langbauer emphatically claims that Esther is “so brainwashed” by Victorian gender and domestic ideology that she is “intent on maintaining the male order” (Langbauer 153). Here I incline towards the opinions taken by feminist critics such as Brenda Ayres who interprets Esther’s journey towards her role of “the queen of middle-class virtues” as a painful struggle with what Victorians perceive as her unwomanly nature. Ayres notes that Esther’s constant self-denial does not come across as natural and joyful. On the contrary, Esther makes so many efforts to deny herself that she is portrayed as “forcing herself to conform” (Ayres 153). In this way, her narrative “inadvertently but severely undercuts the benevolence and the absolute value of the domestic ideology” (153).

To understand this complex, I employ Suzanne Graver’s observations about the double visions in Esther’s narration, in which Graver recognizes two narrative voices: “a dominant one that is cheerfully accepting and selflessly accommodating; and a muted one, itself double-edged, that is inquiring, critical, and discontented but also hesitant, self-disparaging, and defensive” (qtd. in Ayres 142). In the light of Graver’s theory, I

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6While Graver notes that Esther struggles “between her affirming or accommodating self and the critical or desiring self she at once suppresses and obliquely expresses” (qtd. in Pittard 291), she argues that Dickens “uses Esther’s obliqueness not to subvert Victorian
read the dominant voice as Esther’s disguise, in which she pretends to adapt herself to social expectations of women. The muted voice, the embodiment of her inner struggle and rebelliousness, is what she actually wants the reader to perceive. Clearly, we can hear these two voices at the same time when the adult Esther tells about the girlhood secret she confides in the doll:

> It made me very sorry to consider how good [my godmother] was, and how unworthy of her I was; I used ardently to hope that I might have a better heart; and I talked it over very often with the dear old doll; but I never loved my godmother as I ought to have loved her, and as I felt I must have loved her if I had been a better girl. (Dickens 28)

Throughout this passage, two voices are going on at the same time. The adult narrator projects the dominant voice to deny her dislike of her godmother and to persuade herself to stifle it. By raising this voice, Esther pretends to repress her inappropriate emotions and to perform the role of an obedient woman. Meanwhile, she is encouraging the reader to see through her disguise and hear her muted voice, in which she tends to suggest to the reader that her dislike is reasonable. When she appears to blame herself for not having “a better heart,” she is criticizing her godmother’s coldheartedness. Then she clearly implies through great irony that she wishes, not her childish self, but her godmother “had been better.” The young Esther is already rebelling for refusing to acknowledge the emotions she does not feel, and the adult Esther, who has received enough discipline to be adept in feminine conduct, is still extremely critical with her godmother. Hence, she still

womanly ideals, but to celebrate a dutifully willed acceptance of them” (qtd. in Danahay 426). Here, I make use of her theory to put forward a counterargument, reading Esther as the passionate rebel against Victorian gender ideology.
expresses her disagreement over the feminine values her godmother and Greenleaf School instill into her. Not only does Esther indicate the existence of her rebellious self, but also she exerts overwhelming influence on the reader to take her side. Additionally, the doll is the antecedent to the young women that Esther later takes care of – Ada, Caddy and Charley. In mothering the doll, the young Esther stakes an independent claim to judgment, authority, and emotional connection denied to her by Miss Barbary. Later, in mothering these young women, the adult Esther continues this rebellion.

In this way, Esther resembles Jane and Catherine: all of these female orphans show their rebelliousness during childhood. They have been engaged in the same struggle from childhood and they all make this struggle visible to the reader. But unlike Catherine who never even pretends to surrender to male authority, Esther in most cases appears to abandon her unconventional. The novel exhibits her inability to finally do so: the image of her doll reappears at times after she reaches adulthood. These reappearances occur “at the moments of distress and of the return of the repressed” (Pittard 287). That is, when she recalls the doll, she reminds both herself and the reader of the rebelliousness coming from her orphanhood.

The image of the doll resurfaces after the scene in which Mr. Guppy professes his passion for Esther and declares his intention to investigate her genealogy. She rejects him promptly. After Mr. Guppy leaves, Esther deals with business transactions and then

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7 Hochman and Wachs also mentions the muted voice in Esther’s narrative, they note that Esther’s judgments on other characters “seem on the whole to organize [the reader’s] judgment of what goes on in the novel” (Hochman and Wachs 98). But they go on to argue the limitation of Esther’s judgments: “because of her struggle for control of her own feelings, she cannot experience or express the horror and pain of abandonment that is central to the novel’s vision of life” (98). However, I am more inclined to argue that the muted voice indeed directs the reader to discover Esther’s true feelings.
does the housework. In so doing, she feels “so composed and cheerful” as if she totally
leaves the unexpected incident behind (Dickens 154). Again, the muted voice says that
she is not “cheerful,” neither does she forget Guppy’s offer of marriage. Thus, it is not
surprising that when she gets rid of the housework and goes back into her room, she
expresses conflicting emotions:

I surprised myself by beginning to laugh about it, and then surprised
myself still more by beginning to cry about it. In short, I was in a flutter
for a little while; and felt as if an old chord had been more coarsely
touched than it ever had been since the days of the dear old doll, long
buried in the garden. (154)

Here, it is apparent that Esther is not enjoying domestic responsibilities at all. Instead, she
is taken up with the housework only to get rid of her thoughts about Guppy’s offer of
marriage. The dominant voice expresses her fear, declaring that she has no interest in
marrying him, for she has no desire to expose the truths about her past. However, the
muted voice calls her excitement out: her hidden secret is noticed and is to be uncovered
by someone else. She is clearly indicating the doll, as well as her repressed self, continues
to exist. Nevertheless, according to her refusal to Guppy’s proposal, she cannot accept
her repressed self because she is unable to resolve the conflict between her femaleness
and femininity.

The last reference to her doll takes place when Esther has her first encounter with
Lady Dedlock. In this scene, the orphan finally finds her mother and becomes aware of
her parentage. Esther tells us:
Shall I ever forget the rapid beating at my heart, occasioned by the look I met, as I stood up! ...And, very strangely, there was something quickened within me, associated with the lonely days at my godmother’s; yes, away even to the days when I had stood on tiptoe to dress myself at my little glass after dressing my doll. And this, although I had never seen this lady’s face before in all my life – I was quite sure of it – absolutely certain. (290)

That Esther recalls “the lonely days at [her] godmother’s” seems to suggest that she identifies the relationship among Lady Dedlock, Miss Barbary, and herself. When she reminds herself of her reflection in the “little glass,” she seems to recognize the similarity in appearance among the three. But since Esther has been informed that her mother should be her disgrace, it is inappropriate for her to even suppose that she has blood relation to a noble woman like Lady Dedlock. Thus, she immediately recalls her doll to repress her rebellious thoughts of Lady Dedlock, but at the same time, the reappearance of her doll indicates that she is still longing for a mother, who is not what Miss Barbary calls her disgrace. It becomes clear that Esther still keeps her rebellious critical thinking about her godmother, and she refuses to follow her instruction on rejecting her mother. So, when she and Lady Dedlock later discover their mother-daughter relation, Esther forgives her mother at once.

In her depiction of the reconnection scene with her mother, Esther expresses her fear: “The beating of my heart was so violent and wild, that I felt as if my life were breaking from me” (579). Esther is frightened to resume her relationship with Lady Dedlock, not only because her existence could divulge her mother’s secret, but also
because she is afraid of losing control of her suppressed rebelliousness. In this way, the reason why Esther decides to keep their relationship undisclosed is not only to protect the reputation of Lady Dedlock and her family, but also to keep the peace of her own life. The reconnection nevertheless has considerable influence on Esther. When Lady Dedlock escapes for being identified as the possible murder suspect, Esther gives chase to her along with Inspector Bucket, driven by the hope that she can forgive her mother and save her emotionally and morally. As J. Hillis Miller claims, Lady Dedlock’s escape can be read as an escape to “freedom to be one’s destined self” (qtd. in Ayres 148). It can be argued that her “destination” is Nemo, her buried lover Captain James Hawdon, whom she finally determines to join.

Indeed, Lady Dedlock can be read as another Catherine of *Wuthering Heights*. It is notable that *Bleak House* presents Lady Dedlock not only as a fallen woman, but also as a rebellious character. As Tyler Stoehr argues, she is a passionate woman who not only has “a wild love affair,” but also indulges herself with “rage and grief in the privacy of her boudoir” (qtd. in Ayres 147). In other words, she rebels against the traditional gender ideology by both violating patriarchal order and betraying feminine conduct of hiding improper passion. In the initial reference to Lady Dedlock, she seems to already quell her rebellion and is described as the lady who keeps “an exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction” (Dickens 22). She must take up a desperate struggle to repress her rebelliousness, for her “composure” is “exhausted” and her “placidity” is worn-out. She is the lady who always “shad[es] her face with a hand-screen” (25). Her efforts to define herself as a perfect Victorian lady are impressive but ultimately futile. In their reunion scene, Esther tells us
that Lady Dedlock “drew her habitual air of proud indifference about her like a veil, though she soon cast it off again” (579). When she uncovers the fact that her daughter, the evidence of her violations, is still alive, she begins to lose control of her hidden femaleness, which becomes so uncontrollable that she finally determines to kill herself.8

It is not difficult to draw parallels between Lady Dedlock and Esther, and the two Cathrines. In this way, Esther’s encounter with her mother gives her a “rapid beating” of her heart that awakens the rebelliousness she inherits from her mother. Similar to Cathy, Esther takes up her mother’s unsuccessful rebellion and launches her successful version. When Esther chases after her mother, she makes a similar journey to achieve liberation and freedom.

Not the Perfect Kind of Woman

In Esther’s depiction of women like Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle, she ironically attacks them because they do not take full domestic responsibility. Since Victorian gender ideology aims to silence women, Esther also seems to criticize these women for they have their own ideas and judgments. So literary critics have always considered Esther as the ideal feminine model Dickens sets against the wrong kind of woman. For example, Ellen Moers notes that Mrs. Jellyby and her daughter Caddy are used to prove that “the misdirection of female energies to social causes, at the cost of domestic responsibilities, brings havoc to marriage, home, family, indeed all society”

8 Lord Dedlock seems not to matter much. While he and is very likely to forgive her and is so powerful that can keep his wife’s reputation with ease, what Lady Dedlock seeks is not her husband’s pardon. She tries to lead an authentic life in which she can accept her repressed self. On her journey to death, she becomes a homeless wanderer, and she ends up finding her “buried doll,” her deceased lover.
(qtd. in Ayres 144). For Moers, Esther serves to repair this social and domestic damage, although she also notes that independent activities of the “agitating women” like Mrs. Jellyby take place outside the confinement of Victorian female sphere, which can be considered as a version of rebellion (qtd. in Gottfried 10). However, it is notable that through that “wrong” kind of woman, the novel makes it clear that Victorian society does not silence all women. Indeed, most female characters in this novel are endowed with the ability to express their own views, and Esther tends not to criticize them for their overlooking of domestic responsibilities.

Hence, whether Esther is interested in domestic responsibilities becomes a crucial issue. One probably says yes because Esther shows an aptitude for housework at Bleak House, and when she first meets Mr. Jarndyce and talks about her stay at the Jellyby family, she clearly criticizes Mrs. Jelly for being “a little unmindful of her home” (Dickens 83). However, it is notable that Esther is making comments under the guidance of Mr. Jarndyce. By saying “I want to know your real thoughts,” he clearly disagrees that Mrs. Jellyby is merely “a little unmindful” (83). Thus Esther is then trying to live up to his expectations; she hesitates to make judgment: “perhaps, … it is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir; and that, perhaps, while shoes are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them?” (83) Only when Mrs. Jarndyce follows her up and criticizes Mrs. Jellyby does Esther feel relief (84). Hence, it becomes clear that Esther has to agree to women’s domestic responsibilities in order not to disappoint her guardian and employer. Again, she just accepts the roles assigned to her, accommodating herself to be a standard housekeeper to conceal her unconventionality in front of other characters. Her disagreement about domestic ideology is obvious in a
domestic scene during her stay at the Jellyby family. In that scene, Caddy falls asleep on Esther’s lap, then Esther grows sleepy and has a dream, in which, Esther sees Ada, her old Reading friends and finally, a “little mad woman worn out with curtsying and smiling” (63). Esther expresses her reluctance to part with her friends and then her discomfort about the domestic role assigned to her. She clearly sees herself as the little woman in the dream, who is forced to pretend “curtsying and smiling,” and who is driven “mad” and “worn out” because of the domestic responsibilities. Then, returning from the dream to the domestic scene, Esther ends her description of the dream by saying: “Lastly, it was no one, and I was no one” (63). While being aware of that she does not want to conform to conventional values, she remains uncertain about what she wants and thus still struggles for selfhood.

In Esther’s writing about men, meanwhile, she always gives brief descriptions and at times misreads their characters. Meanwhile, women are invariably at the center of her narrative. It is not difficult to draw parallels between Esther and women she writes about, including both her mother and Mrs. Jellyby. Esther, consequently, understands herself and lets the reader to understand herself through these women. Although Esther finds fault with Mrs. Jellyby’s inconformity to Victorian domestic ideology, she is not criticizing her for being the wrong kind of woman. Instead, Mrs. Jellyby embodies the kind of woman that Esther wants to be, yet she does not recognize this when she first meets the Jellybys. During her stay at their family, Esther does exactly what critics like Moers have noted: by helping with the housework taking care of Jellyby children, she somewhat restores domestic order out of chaos. At this time, Esther perceives the divergence of opinion between Mrs. Jellyby and other Victorians who values domesticity:
“I felt that Mrs Jellyby looked down upon me rather, for being so frivolous; and I was sorry for it; though at the same time I knew that I had no higher pretensions” (58).

Keeping on with previous statement, here, Esther does not feel sorry for being despised, but for “being so frivolous.” And clearly, she has higher ambition than devoting herself to domestic responsibilities, but she does not know what it exactly is. When she goes to the brickmaker’s house to take care of Jo, she distinctly resembles Mrs. Jellyby, and she recognizes this resemblance and its influence on herself: “when we went upon our way, I had for a moment an undefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was. I know it was then, and there, that I had it” (489). If her mother provides Esther with the possibility to accept her repressed self, Mrs. Jellyby offers her a feminine model of what she is willing to do.

The novel ends with Esther ultimately finding what she wants – to be a doctor’s wife. Critics have always read the novel’s ending with Esther and Allan Woodcourt’s union as the perfect portrait of Victorian domestic and gender ideology. For example, Graver reads Esther’s marriage to Woodcourt as the reward for her feminine virtue – self-denial. Michael Slater sees their marriage as the embodiment of patriarchal authority. He calls Esther “a woman who has no choice,” for she appears to “be entirely manipulated, along with her lover, by the masterfully paternal figure of Mr Jarndyce” (Slater 167). However, as the rebellious orphan, Esther must not marry Mr. Jarndyce who exerts overwhelming dominance over her. She cannot be trapped into the patriarchal household Mr. Jarndyce inherits from his ancestor. Rather, Esther is supposed to create her new family and establish a new order in it. She is therefore granted the role of mistress of the
new Bleak House and reaches her economic success while Allan Woodcourt is not taken as the house’s master.

In the novel’s closure, a new order is crystallized in the newly-formed family. While Esther does not assume clear dominance over her husband, she is not kept in a state of subjection. As Andre’ L. DeCuir argues, their marriage is between two equal individuals, which allows Esther to have a more active life: she is allowed to “go about into a house of any degree much like Allan is allowed to go about in an area such as Tom-all-Alone’s and administer to those in need” (DeCuir 79). In the concluding paragraphs, Allan asks her if she looks into the glass:

“And don’t you know that you are prettier than you ever were?”

I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now. But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can very well do without much beauty in my – even supposing –. (Dickens 989)

Obviously, Allan observes a positive change in Esther’s countenance. He disregards her scar and perceives her spiritual beauty. This beauty comes from the fact that she enjoys more privileges in their marriage, but Esther’s ambition is yet to be fulfilled. To Allan’s question Esther responds that she does not know if she should perceive herself as pretty, and the dash at the very end indicates that Esther resists being contented with the domestic life as a housewife. As Ayre argues, the ending portrays Esther as a woman who, “although outwardly conforming to the standards expected of her, still struggles
within those limitations” (Ayre 152). Marrying an equal spirit scores Esther a phased victory in her progress, but she is still involved in the unresolved conflict. Her struggle continues and is probably never to be resolved, but she is never going to bent on Victorian gender ideology.
CONCLUSION

For many people, orphans in the nineteenth-century England appear to be the homeless street urchins who struggle to survive. But indeed in Victorian novels, most orphan figures, in particular orphan protagonists, belong to the middle class. The focus of these characters, therefore, shifts from their struggle to survive in material deprivation into their conflict to accommodate themselves into the social value system. Among these middle-class protagonists, female orphans take up a pivotal position in orphan novels. The three novels examined in this thesis provide the reader with narratives of female survival. By foregrounding the outsiders who make strenuous efforts to legitimize themselves and to find a secure position, the authors offer possible alternative forms of Victorian society.

A similar theme runs through all the three novels, placing their heroines in various situations but always returning to the same conclusion. Each novel provides a version of female rebellion, letting the orphans cast doubt on and mount resistance against Victorian gender and domestic ideology. At the beginning of their journey, all the girls suffer from parental deprivation, and emotional and social isolation. They are brought into the same conflict between femaleness and femininity, but ultimately arrive at the ideal destination. In *Jane Eyre*, the orphan girl wields her destructive power to destroy the patriarchal household she enters into, and finally constructs a new home in which she asserts complete dominance. In *Wuthering Heights*, the first generation female orphan achieves success in revoking the patriarchal order. Her daughter takes up her mother’s rebellion, identifies herself as an unconventional woman and preserves the inverted patriarchal order. In *Bleak House*, the orphan narrator stages her rebellion and exerts her narrative
power to take the reader to her side. The ultimate success of the female orphan clearly indicates that women’s voices and strength during the period are not as weak as Victorian ideology advocates.

However, it is notable that the Victorian female orphan achieves a comparatively limited success in the rebellion. As Gilbert and Gubar mention in their book, Charlotte Brontë seems to suggest at the ending of *Jane Eyre* that “True minds…must withdraw into a remote forest, a wilderness even, in order to circumvent the strictures of a hierarchal society” (Gilbert and Gubar 369). Similarly, in *Wuthering Heights*, Cathy can only generate her new form of domesticity in the “perfect misanthropist’s heaven” that is “so completely removed from the stir of society” (*Wuthering Heights* 1). In addition, all the female orphans receive inheritance or presentation of properties from a family member or male seniority: Jane from her uncle John Eyre, Cathy from both Heathcliff and Edgar, Esther from John Jarndyce. And it is clear that economic wealth assists them in assuming autonomy and power. One can argue that the authors cannot completely disregard the influence of Victorian gender ideology, and thus it is the safest choice for them to grant their heroines power through inheritance. It still remains to uncover the reason why female authors like Charlotte Brontë do not let Jane Eyre to make money through writing as they do; however, all these authors do make innovative attempt to deal with the dominating ideology during their period.

From Brontë sisters to Charles Dickens, readers can perceive the similar concern of the authors. In their works, women start to go on the stage and challenge traditional gender stereotypes. The examination of the female orphan’s struggle between femaleness and femininity opens up the possibility that Victorian society, or at least the society in
Victorian novels, does not adhere to the conventional ideology as rigorously as we have thought before. The fact that none of these novels present an ideal family unit somehow rejects the domestic ideology centering on the sublime family. Hence, the rebel can be endowed with the ability to destabilize and destroy her old house of patriarchy, and to further establish a somewhat reversed version of gender dynamics. It can be argued that the female orphan, as the outlier of the conventional value system, appear more destructive than those women inside the value system. However, the fact that Victorian readers enjoyed reading the novels examined in this thesis suggests that they possibly inclined to challenge the status quo as well. In this way, this thesis can provide a different direction to look into Victorian gender ideology.
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