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Villette: Anglo-American Feminist Criticism Revisited

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[ABSTRACT]

Anglo-American feminist criticism has contributed to the provision of methods for the discussion and assessment of Charlotte Brontë's works. *Villette*, concerned with the interlocking issues of femininity and sexuality, particularly justifies the pertinence of such a theoretical angle in its textual analysis. The novel is often considered a paradigmatic feminist text and critics have located feminist consciousness immanent in the novel due to the recurrent references to female rage and anxiety. But Brontë's elusive fiction, replete with multiple strata of signification, cannot be fully elucidated by such a monolithic approach. First and foremost, *Villette* evinces textual uncertainty, which incessantly displaces meanings and identities. The instability of characterization seems to negate the integrated humanist conception of the individual self. It further calls into question the very probability of interpretation itself. That suspicion is substantiated by the evasiveness of the narrative and the precariousness of the plot. In this respect, *Villette* turns out

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to be a touchstone in considering the strength and limitation of Anglo-American feminist criticism. By radically stirring up central assumptions around the notion of the unitary self which underlies the tactics of the criticism, *Villette* engages us to reassess its methods and possibilities and to revise the fundamental contradictions of the critical position, suggesting a more complex and non-linear perspective.

In spite of F. R. Leavis's assertion that "there is only one Brontë",[1] critical consensus bestows a due recognition on Charlotte Brontë, placing her in the great continuum of nineteenth-century English literature (Leavis 1972, 39). Her writing touches upon the currents of Victorian society in which it was conceived and produced. It features, more than anything else, a wide range of assumptions and arguments about the Woman Question of the day. All her works address relevant issues in one way or another, illustrating the impact of the topical issues on contemporary literature. Feminist criticism, therefore, defines Charlotte Brontë as a feminist writer, centering upon her interrogation of power structure within the patriarchal institution. Indeed feminist criticism has contributed to the provision of methods for the discussion and assessment of her works ever since the publication of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1978). The latter, in particular, acclaims Charlotte Brontë as a "stellar example" in the age of the female novelists (3). The critic observes:

> In rejecting Austen and deciding instead to write about "what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life", Charlotte Brontë had chosen a volcanic literature of the body as well as the heart, a sexual and often supernatural world. (85)

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[1] That one, of course, refers to Emily.

Villette, Charlotte Brontë's mature, highly confessional novel of 1853, is concerned with the interlocking issues of femininity and sexuality and, accordingly, justifies the pertinence of the afore-mentioned theoretical angle in its textual analysis. A paradigmatic feminist text, *Villette* foregrounds female repression, deprivation and powerlessness by configuring a socially marginalized single woman bent on standing on her own feet. In this context, the present article is intended to examine the central concerns of *Villette* from a feminist perspective, considering to what extent this critical position affords insight into the text and how and in what ways the novel could be mapped out within the theoretical framework of Anglo-American feminism.

Villette is characterized by unorthodox narrative strategies. First and foremost, it presents an unreliable narrator. Lucy Snowe, the novel's first-person narrator and heroine, strikes one as puzzling. Neither her origin nor her end is communicated to the reader and hers is simply a life "lived in the interims of traumatic events" (O'Rourke 2006, 166). Her story-telling is ambiguous, aberrant and often delusive. She withholds information, omits details and deliberately misleads the reader. Consequently, the plot is precarious and much is left with the reader's conjecture, resulting in the perplexing fissures of the narrative. The following passage, which obliquely relates the vicissitudes of Lucy's unknown past, is a case in point:

> I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass ⋯ Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well re-

> member a time—a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.[2]

Moreover, *Villette* tends to displace the main character Lucy, bringing into highlight other characters instead. Lucy plays a part of a coolly detached observer rather than an engaged actor. Accordingly, the text is redolent of "the testimony of a voyeur" obsessed with "deflected, displaced desire, skewed self-regard, and passion" (Polhemus 1990, 113). This is particularly prominent in the opening chapters where Lucy's vision is akin to that of a reflex mirror.

The female characters of the novel come under intense scrutiny. They are, by and large, presented as the surrogates of the heroine. They can be seen as Lucy's alter egos at different stages, to whom Lucy projects herself in varying degrees (Crosby 1984, *passim*). Little Polly, neat, prim and demure, represents the Victorian ideal of femininity and becomes the object of Lucy's wish-fulfilling projection. Ginevra, flighty, care-free and pleasure-seeking, "embodies Lucy's attraction to self-indulgence and freedom" (Gilbert and Guba 1984, 409). Miss Marchmont, who awaits reunion with her bereaved fiancé in death all her life, uncannily prefigures Lucy's later life.[3]

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[2] Charlotte Brontë, 1972, *Villette*, New York: Harper & Row. 30. All subsequent references to this edition will be made parenthetically in the text.

[3] The chapter "Miss Marchmont" could read as "an abstract of the plot, the tone, the matter and manner of the book" in the sense that her fate and text is, in the end, completely merged with Lucy's (Polhemus 1990, 121).

An observant but dispassionate outsider, Lucy renders all these figures stand out with a distinct contour, while she herself stands inscrutable, being defined in terms of others: "Madame Beck esteemed [her] learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet", whilst M. Paul views her "a fiery and rash nature —adventurous, indocile, and audacious" (294). It is none other than Lucy who solicits these (mis)readings and she is amused by them. Indeed, she is disposed to remain as a blank slate which resists inscription. She leads a "plotless existence" (Boone 1998, 45-46), emerging as a "vanishing subject" who delivers a "non-story" (Wisnicki 2008, 128-29).

The unusual story-telling is symptomatic on Lucy's part, since it is her "characteristic manoeuvre … to avoid attention by remaining on the periphery and to escape suffering by living vicariously through the lives of others" (Nestor 1987, 85). There is something morbid and unsettling about her insistence on averting the reader's consciousness away from her. She appears to fall victim to some psychological blockage, which accounts for her characteristic repression and self-effacement. She is stranded somewhere between engagement with life and retreat from it. For instance, she craves for romantic love but consistently holds back her passion at every turn. She also yearns for something beyond her constricted existence but cannot give expression to her desire due to her deep-seated misgivings. In sum, she is an internally scarred and split character:

> with my usual base habit of cowardice, I shrunk into my sloth like a snail into its shell, and alleged incapacity and impracticability as a pretext to escape action. … Not that true contentment dignified this infatuated resignation: my work had neither charm for my taste, nor hold on my interest;

> but it seemed to me a great thing to be without heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial; the negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know. Besides, I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter. (71-72)

As is indicated above, Lucy is contradictory and her clashing impulses are pent up in her strained voice. The pervading sense of fracture, which makes the text destabilizing, is more or less attributed to the antithetical needs that Lucy seeks to placate simultaneously. Beneath her placid inoffensive mask her fiery facet is concealed. Millett positively detects the subversive energy harboured in Lucy's inner self, calling her "a neurotic revolutionary full of conflict, backsliding, anger, terrible self-doubt, and an unconquerable determination to win through" (140). Heather Glen also contends that Lucy's turbulent inner self, "figured in a lurid, metaphoric language, full of personified abstractions and biblical allusions" appears to bespeak "energies that threaten to burst the bonds of realism" (200).

The "London" chapter charts Lucy's potentially mutinous streak at odds with her own repression. The journey to London is oppressive and baffling for her but she tries to combat against her timidity by reassuring herself that "it is better to go forward than backward, and that I *could* go forward" (43). In London her ever-fettered ambition begins to be released and she is determined not to "abandon [her] faculties to the eating rust of obscurity" (43). Getting into the heart of city life, she sees and feels the metropolis with a sense of elation and delight:

> Prodigious was the amount of life I lived that morning. ⋯ My state of mind, and all accompanying circumstances, were just now such as most to favour the adoption of a new, resolute and daring—perhaps desperate—line of action. I had nothing to lose. (44)

But the momentary excitement soon gives way to a clear-headed awareness that the city is essentially the male business sphere where the logic of competition and self-interest prevails; and that, as an unguarded, dispossessed woman, she is not fit to get on in the fiercely aggressive mercenary world (Weisser 1997, 77-78). Thus, with a sort of sagacity gained, she sets out to Villette in search of a new life. On her way to the continental town, Lucy is put into perils on several occasions, for she is easily taken in as a woman. She feels unsustained and is distressed by a sense of insecurity and anxiety which overcomes her. Her vulnerability is recurrently associated with her gender, best exemplified by the quotation below:

> Just as I passed a portico, two moustachioed men came suddenly from behind the pillars; they were smoking cigars, their dress implied pretensions to the rank of gentlemen, but, poor things! they were very plebeian in soul. They spoke with insolence, and, fast as I walked, they kept pace with me a long way. At last I met a sort of patrol, and my dreaded hunters were turned from the pursuit; but they had driven me beyond my reckoning: when I could collect my faculties, I no longer knew where I was; the staircase I must long since have passed; puzzled, out of breath, all my pulses throbbing in inevitable agitation, I knew not where to turn. It was terrible to think of again encountering those bearded, sneering simpletons; yet the ground must be retraced, and the steps sought out. (59)

The Pensionnat de Demoiselles, where Lucy is admitted as a governess and later becomes a teacher, is far from an institution dedicated to a serious pursuit of teaching and learning. Rather it is in accordance with the prevailing ideas and values of patriarchal society, meant to produce moderately-equipped women with leisurely accomplishments:

> what I saw at first was the thriving outside of a large and flourishing educational establishment. Here was a great house, full of healthy, lively girls, all well dressed and many of them handsome, gaining knowledge by a marvellously easy method, without painful exertion or useless waste of spirits; not, perhaps, making very rapid progress in anything; taking it easy, but still always employed, and never oppressed. (69)

The headmistress Madame Beck, firm, tactful and immensely competent, assumes the role of an efficient superintendent of police in the education of young women. She possesses brilliant administrative skills and management methods. She rules over all by means of plotting, counter-plotting, espionage and surveillance. She haunts the school in her "souliers de silence" and "glide[s] ghost-like through the house, watching and spying everywhere, peering through every keyhole, listening behind every door" (68). Madame is also a paragon of self-command. Even deeply disturbing moments find her perfectly capable of mastering herself. She serenely pulls herself together and carries on her business, not revealing any sign of inward agitation.

Lucy admires and does justice to these qualities of Madame. As is briefly mentioned before, Lucy has the repressed desire to make her way, being a good deal bent on success. She deems herself as a character on the rise (301) and accepts the challenge when Madame offers her a teaching post. It can be stated that Lucy, if unacknowledged in the text, furtively identifies herself with the formidable older woman who incarnates power, independence and consummate self-possession. Therefore, when Lucy applauds the way in which Madame holds herself in check, she "applaud[s] her own commitment to self-surveillance" (Gilbert and Guba 1984, 409).

Madame Beck is essentially a masculinized woman whose empowerment hinges upon her complicity with patriarchy. In other words, she is a functionary in the service of guarding a male-dominated system. Lucy astutely perceives that Madame bears not "a woman's aspect but rather a man's" (72). Madame is, if seemingly powerful and self-reliant, a "dutiful daughter" nonetheless, "surviving and exercising [her] power in and through an alliance with a status quo that requires the constant sexual and intellectual policing of other women" (Boumelha 1990, 120).

Despite her frigid exterior, Lucy has the secret longing to love and to be loved but that longing is subject to relentless suppression of her own. Her neurotic constitution, in conjunction with social dictates demanding female propriety, accounts for such a self-division. The object of her passion is Dr. John, the grown-up Graham Bretton, whose identity she has always known but kept to herself. Her love remains unrequited. Dr. John is entirely out of touch with the person she really is and merely treats her in a kind-hearted and patronizing good humour to gratify his "natural benevolence" (247). To a degree, his cordiality meets her emotional needs but her association with him ultimately compels her to reinforce her defensive strategies. Her expedient with her avid feelings is to quell them in the pain of self-crucifixion: "this longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head; which I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples" (104). In brief, the heart-rending love leads her to more severe acts of suppression and self-abnegation, which culminates in the burial of his letters:

> I then made a little roll of my letters, wrapped them in oiled silk, bound them with twine, and, having put them in the bottle, got the old Jew broker to stopper, seal and make it air-tight. … Now Methusaleh, though so very old, was of sound timber still; only there was a hole, or rather a deep hollow, near his root. I knew there was such a hollow, hidden partly by ivy and creepers growing thick round; and there I meditated hiding my treasure. But I was not only going to hide a treasure—I meant also to bury a grief. That grief over which I had lately been weeping, as I wrapped it in its winding-sheet, must be interred. … I fetched thence a slate and some mortar, put the slate on the hollow, secured it with cement, covered the whole with black mould, and, finally, replaced the ivy. This done, I rested, leaning against the tree; lingering, like any other mourner, beside a newly-sodded grave. (288-89)

The obsessiveness revealed in the act of burial above verges on malady, shedding light on the extent to which Lucy strives to contain her desire. However, the burial could be seen in a more liberating light, for Lucy inters her grief along with the letters. The act, as "a conscious and deliberate ritual of expressing her feelings and her loss" signifies the point that she leaves behind her old bondage and is ready to move on (Maynard 1984, 193).

The references to performing and visual arts in the novel claim attention in that they invariably bring about gendered issues. To begin with, the actress Vashti stands for female empowerment and self-assertion. As a "demonic double" for the heroine, Vashti sets up a correlative to Lucy's inner flame (Boumelha 1990, 109). Vashti is named after the biblical queen in the Book of Esther who is dethroned for her rejection of King Ahasuerus's command to exhibit herself as a spectacle in public. Lucy is fascinated with the performer's compelling stage presence:

> What I saw was the shadow of a royal Vashti: a queen, fair as the day once, turned pale now like twilight, and wasted like wax in flame. ⋯ Behold! I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength—for she was but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the pit! They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate, and Murder, and Madness incarnate she stood. (250)

Gilbert and Gubar regard Vashti's art as a "feminist reaction to patriarchal aesthetics" which casts doubt on the "closed forms of male culture" (424). Lucy's reaction to the actress is intriguingly ambivalent, illustrating her unsuccessful attempt to come to terms with the accepted gender norms. Lucy is at once attracted and repulsed by the exorbitance with which Vashti gives herself away: "It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation. It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral" (250).

More disturbing is the vaudeville show on the fête day in which Lucy herself performs, against her will, in masculine garments, blurring sexual identities in a curious manner. Millett looks upon the performance as "one of the most indecorous scenes in the entire Victorian novel" (141). The play-acting scene takes on significance in dual levels. First, it marks a rare occasion on which Lucy renounces her persona as a "mere looker-on at life" to exhibit herself in the footlights with a "keen relish for dramatic expression" (135). The scene also alludes to Lucy's potentially androgynous tendencies or "polymorphous sexuality" (Burkhart 1973, 107).[4] In the play she acts out the part of a foppish gentleman in a love-triangle paying court to Ginevra. The latter preens her feathers in the role of a "coquette between two suitors", throwing "a certain marked fondness and pointed partiality into her manner" towards the fop (134). In fact, Lucy evolves ambiguous feelings towards Ginevra in the course of the narrative and her attraction to the latter's charm is suggested throughout.[5] Given that the vaudeville show is "a play within a play miming the lovers and their fates in the novel" (Polhemus 1990, 132), it is tempting to read Lucy's playing Ginevra's lover in transvestite excess as a sign of her subterranean desire for the flippant but "fascinatingly pretty" friend (132).

The two paintings *Cleopatra* and *La vie d'une femme*, which come under Lucy's examination at the art gallery, represent gender stereotyping pure and simple. The Rubensesque image, *Cleopatra*, shows the eponymous queen with "wealth of muscle" and "affluence of flesh" lying semi-recumbent on a couch in broad daylight (192).[6] Indecently-dressed, she looks sensual, dissolute and provocative. This is a quintessential image of sexualized female subject. Lucy disapproves of the stark carnality in the picture as "coarse and preposterous" (193).

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[4] For a study of the dissolution of gender identities in *Villette*, see Christina Crosby, 1984, "Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text," *SEL*. 24.4: 701-15.

[5] Notable examples include: "I had seen her last in elegant evening attire. I don't know that she looked less charming now in her school dress, a kind of careless peignoir of a dark blue material, dimly and dingily plaided with black. I even think this dusky wrapper gave her charms a triumph; enhancing by contrast the fairness of her skin, the freshness of her bloom, the golden beauty of her tresses" (226); "I don't know why I chose to give my bread rather to Ginevra than to another: nor why, if two had to share the convenience of one drinking vessel … I always contrived that she should be my convive, and rather liked to let her take the lion's share" (227).

[6] For the construction of sexuality and representation with regard to the painting, see Jill L. Matus, 1995, "Looking at Cleopatra: The Expression and Exhibition of Desire in *Villette*," *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representation of Sexuality and Maternity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 131-48.

The serial painting *La vie d'une femme* presents a pictorial compendium of conventional femininity prescribed by androcentric culture. The idealized icons stir Lucy in no way either. Rather she finds the representation immediately oppressive and rails against them as "insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities" (195). The insipid mawkish painting is a patriarchal propaganda at best:

> The first represented a 'Jeune Fille,' coming out of a church door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up—the image of a most villainous little precocious she-hypocrite. The second, a 'Mariée' with a long white veil, kneeling, at a *prie-dieu* in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger, and showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner. The third, a 'Jeune Mère,' hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon. The fourth, a 'Veuve,' being a black woman, holding by the hand a black little girl, and the twain studiously surveying an elegant French monument, set up in a corner of some Père la Chaise. (195)

In effect, the two pictures articulate the ways in which the definition of femininity is subject to incessant polarization. The *Cleopatra* and *La vie d'une femme* set is yet another variant of the prevailing dichotomy which reduces women to two-dimensional beings. In the novel the idea and practice of gender stereotyping is most explicitly vindicated by M. Paul. Disturbed by the sight of Lucy looking at *Cleopatra* at the gallery, the fussy squeamish moralist impels her to view the second image instead. He is a misogynist and is prone to estimate women by dint of binary opposition: angelic/demonic, pure/impure, sexual/asexual. For him, the prime feminine quality consists in beauty and an intellectual woman is an oddity or a mutant which goes against nature. His sexist outlook is clearly articulated:

> A "woman of intellect" … was a sort of "lusus naturæ," a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife nor worker. Beauty anticipated her in the first office. He believed in his soul that lovely, placid and passive feminine mediocrity was the only pillow on which manly thought and sense could find rest for its aching temples; and as to work, male mind alone could work to any good practical result. (344)

Although Lucy is growingly appreciative of the other side of M. Paul and there exists a mutual understanding between them, his insistence on male chauvinism persists and his despotic bearing hinders the relationship. The fact that Paul witnesses the visitation of the spectral nun together with Lucy and shares her feeling of fear—unlike Dr. John who has dismissed the nun as Lucy's hallucination—is emblematic of the two's intertwined destiny. Yet their idyll in the Faubourg Clotilde, where Lucy comes to serve as the "steward of his property" is by no means untroubled, for Lucy's better self or her autonomy is seriously undercut by her voluntary subjugation to male supremacy (478).

Villette is often considered a classic feminist text and critics have located feminist consciousness immanent in the novel, taking notice of the recurrent references to female anxiety and rage *par excellence*. But Charlotte Brontë's elusive fiction is too replete with multiple strata of signification to be fully elucidated by such a monolithic approach. It is noticeable that *Villette* consistently keeps textual definiteness at bay. The text is teeming with semantic uncertainties and ambiguities. The ending is also left inconclusive, refraining from providing any clean-cut finality. This is, doubtless, a text which resists being taken at face value, dispersing and displacing its meanings and identities.

As a result, much of *Villette* is informed by its slides, fissures and disjunctions, which furnish some lodgement of an open, subversive reading even in seemingly unequivocal sites. Most conspicuous is characterization, which is inextricably linked with the writer's conceptualization of subject. The narrator has fluid identity and different people have different perceptions of her. She is delineated with such terms as neurotic, morbid, split, schizophrenic or obsessional, which appears to negate the integrated humanist conception of the individual self. It further calls into question the very probability of interpretation itself. That suspicion is substantiated by the evasiveness of the narrative and the precariousness of the plot.

In conclusion, Anglo-American feminist criticism seems to expose its limitations in tackling the textual uncertainty and in percolating from feminist politics "patriarchal aesthetics" which is predicated upon the concept of unitary selfhood (Moi 1985, 69). For one thing, Millett's or Gilbert and Gubar's reading of *Villette* recapitulates the reductionist tendency inherent of such critical practice. In this respect, *Villette* turns out to be an effective touchstone in considering the strength and limitation of Anglo-American feminist criticism. By radically stirring up central assumptions around the notion of the unitary self which underlies the tactics of the criticism, *Villette* engages us to reassess its methods and possibilities and thus to revise the fundamental contradictions of the critical position, suggesting a more complex and non-linear perspective.

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국문초록

『빌레뜨』: 영미 페미니즘 비평 재고(再考)

최지안*

영미 페미니즘 비평은 샤롯 브론테의 작품의 평가와 논의에 있어 주요 방법론을 제공해왔다. 특히 작가의 최후의 걸작 『빌레뜨』는 여성성과 섹슈얼리티의 교차국면을 다룬다는 점에서 상기한 비평이론의 적용 가능성을 예시한다. 비평가들은 작품에 드러난 여성의 분노와 불안을 여성해방 의식의 징후로 보고 『빌레뜨』를 페미니즘 텍스트의 전범(典範)으로 간주해 왔다. 그러나 복합적인 의미의 층위로 구성된 이 작품은 어느 특정 비평론의 단선적인 접근으로 온전히 해명하기 어려운 면이 있다. 우선 『빌레뜨』는 텍스트의 불확정성을 노정하며 이는 작품의 해석을 부단히 교란시킨다. 본 작품의 서술은 의미론적 균열과 부정합에 의해 특징지어지며, 외견상 명시적인 지점에서도 전복적인 해석의 여지를 남긴다. 작품에 나타난 인물 성격의 불안정성은 경험주의적 휴머니즘의 통합된 주체 개념을 부정한다. 특히 작중 화자는 유동적 자아 정체성의 소유자로서, 그의 인지와 담화는 신경증적이고 정신분열적 양상을 보인다. 이와 같은 신빙성 없는 화자의 존재는 서술의 진실성 문제에서 나아가 텍스트의 해석 가능성 자체에 의문을 제기한다. 이 점은 내러티브의 모호성과 플롯의 불안정성에 의해 더욱 심화된다. 밀레트, 쇼왈터, 길버트-구

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바 등 고전적 영미 페미니즘 비평가들은 해당 비평론에 내재한 가부장제 패러다임 즉 이성중심주의 환원론에 입각한 바 『빌레뜨』 텍스트의 불확정성을 해명하는데 한계를 드러낸다. 반면 브론테의 문제적인 소설은 페미니즘 정치학으로부터 데카르트적 자아 개념에 정초한 가부장적 미학을 분리해낼 필요성을 시사한다. 이런 맥락에서 『빌레뜨』는 영미 페미니즘 비평의 강점과 한계를 고찰하는 시금석이 될 수 있다. 영미 페미니즘 비평의 근간이 되는 자율적 안정적 주체 개념을 해체함으로써 『빌레뜨』는 관련 이론의 방법론과 근본 모순의 재고 및 보다 비선형적인 대안적 비평의 모색을 제안한다.