

“A THING DOUBLE-EXISTENT”: PAULINA’S UNCANNY LIMINALITY AND ITS
EFFECTS ON HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN *VILLETTE*

by

JOHANNA REBEKAH CHOTIWAT-FLOYD

(Under the Direction of Tricia Lootens)

ABSTRACT

While most scholarship grants Paulina uncanny power only insofar as she relates to Lucy, this thesis submits that Paulina evinces an uncanny liminality of her own in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*. After exploring the development of Paulina’s uncanny status throughout the course of the novel, this project demonstrates how Paulina’s fluid and uncertain status affects her relationships with Graham Bretton and her father. Ultimately, this thesis concludes, Paulina’s uncanny liminality reveals that her identity is multiple and irreducible.

INDEX WORDS: *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë, Paulina, Gender, Femininity, Double, Women, Identity

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JOHANNA REBEKAH CHOTIWAT-FLOYD

BA, University of Georgia, 2008

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2012

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JOHANNA REBEKAH CHOTIWAT-FLOYD

Major Professor: Tricia Lootens

Committee: Michelle Ballif
Roxanne Eberle

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2012

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CHAPTER 1

UNCANNY ORIGINS

Introduction

The Gothic elements of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) have long been a point of contestation for Victorian scholars.¹ Still, Paulina Home, the small, precocious, beautiful girl who comes to stay at Bretton, returns to her father, and suddenly reappears 227 pages later, has not been unanimously accepted as uncanny in her own right. E. D. H. Johnson, for example, is representative in focusing on the nun and Lucy in his study of the supernatural in *Villette*. More recently, Christina Crosby introduces the countess to the uncanny conversation. Indeed, Crosby even suggests that Paulina exemplifies conventional femininity "in a way so extreme as to display perversely enough *Villette*'s obsessive dualism" (710). Unfortunately, however, even Crosby is quick to dismiss Paulina as one of the novel's two superficial and fixed characters. Like Crosby, I am convinced Paulina is securely rooted in the feminine, yet I disagree with her assertion that Paulina is a straightforward character marked by a "lack of depth, of contradiction, and complexity" (710). I submit that Paulina is, instead, a thoroughly uncanny character whose identity is anything but simple or fixed. Moreover, because traditional gender roles situate women as "relative creatures,"² Paulina's identity should be considered in the context of her relationships to men. This project, then, will investigate what Paulina's uncanny liminality does to heterosexual relationships in *Villette*.

The Uncanny: The Unstable Grounds on Which This Project Rests

Throughout, this project will rely heavily on formulations of the uncanny from Sigmund Freud, and to a lesser extent on conceptions of the uncanny from Ernst Jentsch, Nicholas Royle, and Friedrich Schelling. It may seem anachronistic to impose Freud's theory on a text that precedes it, but the uncanny ties into the Gothic strain *Villette* taps. Indeed, Freud did not create the uncanny, but formulated a theory of the uncanny that relies on texts contemporaneous with or preceding *Villette*. Moreover, Freud draws from a concept of the uncanny from Friedrich Schelling, a contemporary of Brontë's who deemed uncanny "what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open" (Freud 132). Drawing upon Freud's seminal work on the topic, "The Uncanny," (1919) this project understands the uncanny as "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). Equally important to my understanding of the uncanny is its fundamental slipperiness, which Jentsch calls "intellectual uncertainty" (125), and which Royle tells us "has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality" (2).³

The uncanny manifests in various forms in literature.⁴ According to Freud, one of the uncanny motifs at the writer's disposal is the "idea of the 'double' (Doppelgänger), in all its nuances and manifestations" (141).⁵ An uncanny effect unique to literature, Freud tells us, is the writer's ability to "tric[k] us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it" (157). In other words, the reader expects the author to choose and consistently create either "a world that conforms with the reader's familiar reality or one that in some way deviates from it" (156). As Jentsch notes, one way for the writer to create an uncanny effect by violating the reader's expectations is to make the reader

wonder “whether a particular figure is a real person or an automaton, and to do so in such a way that his attention is not focused directly on the uncertainty” (Freud 135). As I will demonstrate later, it is exactly this indeterminacy to which *Villette* subjects the reader.

Although I am designating this an uncanny study, this thesis might well be deemed a queer examination: for, as Royle has pointed out, uncanny is queer and queer is uncanny. Indeed, queer and uncanny theories both deal with issues of blurring boundaries, multiplicity, and departure from a monolithic norm. I am calling this “uncanny,” because I will be foregrounding Paulina’s supernatural and liminal status—that is, I devote much of the project to demonstrating the ways in which Polly’s embodiment of femininity is preternatural. Whereas queer theory carries the connotation of sexual deviation from the norm, this study will focus on showing how Paulina destabilizes binary oppositions that are not explicitly or exclusively sexual—child and adult, life and not-life, and human and not-human—and how this liminality, in turn, problematizes the relationships with her father and husband. Of course, the undermining of these categories connects to Paulina’s embodiment of Victorian femininity and complicates heterosexual desire in *Villette*. This thesis is, thus, not *not* a queer reading.

Feminist narratology may approach the novel with a goal similar to that of my project: to reveal the novel’s resistance to categorization. On one hand, Robyn Warhol uses feminist narratology to make “visible women authors’ activism in exposing and complicating oppressive binary categories within culture” (858). Margaret L. Shaw, on the other hand, explores how *Villette* is narrative that seeks to reconcile the gendered faculties of observation and intuition in a “moral sight” (815).⁶ Because Lucy is the narrator, naturally, the focus of these feminist narratological readings falls on Lucy. For

Warhol, the “doubleness” of the novel is a matter of Lucy’s “dissonant self-narration” (862), while Shaw’s reading turns on the way in which the narrator occupies an interior space that allows her to resist patriarchal control. An uncanny reading, in contrast, allows us to consider the narrator as just one of many possibilities for rendering a text uncanny and blurring distinctions. Though I will briefly show how Lucy’s narration acts as another layer obscuring Paulina’s irreducible identity, I will consider Paulina as much more than a mere projection or construction of Lucy’s narration. The uncanny promises a productive way to acknowledge and learn about the work Polly performs in her superhuman embodiment of Victorian femininity—how she renders the familiar virtues of womanhood strange. Indeed, uncanny theory is one of the lynchpins with which we can bring together the issues scholars have long studied in *Villette*: multiplicity, refusal to stay fixed, genre, doubles, identity, the supernatural, the Gothic, and the buried, to name a few.

***Villette* as Uncanny Novel**

Villette is uncanny in many ways. Perhaps the most obvious representative of the uncanny is the Gothic staple of the phantom nun, who epitomizes the novel’s doubleness, the refusal to commit to one category. Freud tells us that “an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred” (150), and scholars agree that the nun blurs this boundary. E. D. H. Johnson, for instance, notes that the Gothic nun confuses the reader’s expectations of a realist novel, as the “Gothic strain, at home in *Jane Eyre*, strikes an incongruous and discordant note in a novel so rigorously shaped to the demands of realism” (325). Crosby also explores the Gothic convention of the nun, which at first “evok[es] the uncanny dread of the Doppelgänger” but later becomes a

“canny if somewhat implausible practical joke” (706). In other words, for Crosby, the nun transforms from fantastic mystery to an explicable reality. In the figure of the nun, according to Mary Jacobus, “the repression, the uncanny, and the unacknowledged phantom of feminism combine to subvert the novel’s façade of realism” (48).

Apart from the figure of the nun, the novel uncannily blurs the boundary between reality and fantasy in other ways. Robyn Warhol, for instance, points to Lucy’s narration to argue that realism and Gothic romance are in “continuous oscillation” and serve to “double each other” (858). Warhol describes an uncanny split in selfhood, as she attributes the novel’s doubleness to “dissonant” self-narration, in which the realist narrating self is at odds with the Romantic experiencing self (862). Likewise focusing on Lucy’s narrative doubling, Janice Carlisle asserts that “*Villette* is less a narrative in which other characters are granted an autonomous existence than a hall of mirrors in which they are allowed to appear because they serve as facets reflecting the affective truth of Lucy’s life” (279). Thus viewing the other characters as mere doubles of Lucy calls into question the reality of identity.

Indeed, for some critics *Villette*’s doubles do subversive work. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, view Lucy’s ambivalence toward her Doppelgänger as dissatisfaction with the femininities available to her: “Not the little girl lost (Polly), or the coquette (Genevra), or the male manqué (Madame Beck), or the buried nun (in the garden), Lucy cannot be contained by the roles available to her. But neither is she free of them, since all these women do represent aspects of herself” (419). Thus, for Gilbert and Gubar, Lucy’s doubles serve as a critique of Victorian gender norms. Following in Gilbert and Gubar’s footsteps, Crosby credits “the specter of indeterminacy” with

“making troublesome the determination of identity or fixing of an absolute, ‘natural’ difference” (713). Along the same lines, Jacobus points out a few years later that “doubleness informs the novel as a whole, making it secretive, unstable and subversive” (41).

While Paulina has gained recognition as an uncanny character insofar as she relates to, or doubles, Lucy, critics have been reluctant to acknowledge Paulina’s own uncanny power. Gilbert and Gubar, for instance position the younger girl as acting on the narrator’s behalf, as her other half: “Polly acts out all those impulses already repressed by Lucy, so that the two girls represent the two sides of Lucy’s divided self” (404). Armit্ত likewise denies Polly’s uncanny agency by locating her existence within the narrator: “This sense of the projection of uncanniness on to Polly, however, also works as an early piece of mirror identification, for . . . Polly’s main narrative function is to cast reflected light upon Lucy’s past” (217). For Armit্ত, too, Paulina owes her uncanny effect to Lucy’s narration. Similarly, Eva Badowska casts Paulina’s actions as figments of Lucy’s narrative interpretation. Badowska notes, for instance, that Paulina’s “capacity for interiority, for emotion and its containment, is so great as to seem uncanny, transforming her into ‘a small ghost gliding over the carpet’” (1520). At the same time, however, the critic diminishes Paulina’s uncanny agency by attributing her self-sacrificing femininity solely to Lucy’s narration. Specifically, Badowska argues that Paulina does not suffer from “feminine masochism,” but “it is Lucy’s presence as narrator that turns the needle into a ‘skewer’ that ‘inflict[s]’ on Paulina the sadistic violence that must be Lucy’s” (1520).

Likewise, Christina Crosby considers Paulina's significance mainly in terms of how she relates to other characters. For Crosby, as noted, Paulina also lacks depth and serves the narrative function of shedding light on Lucy. This critic casts Paulina as little more than the complement to Graham Bretton, her childhood friend, who, after their reunion ten years later, courts and weds her. Crosby casts Paulina and Graham as two halves of a couple that exemplifies superficiality. These two "mark the conventional separation of masculine and feminine," and "they deserve each other" (710). For Crosby, Paulina acts as the perfect conventionally feminine counterpart to Graham's traditional masculinity because she serves as a "pretty, diminutive, a 'little chamois,' a 'kitten,' a 'little jewel' who is finally exchanged—object that she is—from her Papa to her husband" (710). This passage suggests that chamois, kitten, and jewel are all inherently feminine. Moreover, the grouping together of these terms overlooks the fact that these sundry components that constitute the feminine ideal vary in their meaning. Crosby maintains that "Little Polly and Dr. John are superficial characters, implicitly criticized for their lack of depth, of contradiction, and complexity" (710). In fact, I would argue that Paulina's femininity does not preclude her complexity but, rather, forces her into multiplicity, as the various comparisons imply.

My Project

Although we cannot ignore the power of Lucy as narrator, I would argue that we should explore how Paulina manifests the uncanny apart from her role as Lucy's double. Exploring Paulina's uncanny liminality on her own terms, as distinct from Lucy, is important because viewing Paulina as merely a version or creation of Lucy denies her contribution to the subversive or critical work of the novel, as a whole. True: Paulina

does not cross over to the “wrong side of the antitheses” through “cross-dressing” as Lucy does (Crosby 707). Still, the little countess is rife with contradiction and complexity precisely because the feminine ideal practically forces its adherents to cross boundaries, as the multiple female qualities Crosby delineates suggest. The identity of the ideal woman is anything but fixed: it is, instead, fluid and multiple. In fact, Paulina’s commitment to the feminine causes her to be overlooked as straightforward or simple. Just because she never crosses gender boundaries does not mean she has no contradictory qualities. From within femininity, Paulina blurs other binaries that undergird patriarchy.

Although Crosby dismisses Paulina as a straightforward representative of normative Victorian femininity, and other scholars, like Gilbert and Gubar, Armit, and Badowska, ascribe Paulina’s ghostly multiplicity to Lucy’s narration, Paulina appears as a thoroughly uncanny character characterized by liminality. Paulina enacts the uncanny because her reification of the stereotype we now refer to as the “angel in the house” prevents us from ascertaining whether she is child or adult, alive or not alive. To be sure, it was not until the year following *Villette*’s publication that Coventry Patmore christened the “angel in the house.” Still, he merely codified a gender role that was already in place. The feminine ideal of the angel in the house haunts Victorian culture and continues to haunt us today. As the gender norm circulated throughout the culture and bound up with domesticity and family, the angel in the house is both “well known” and “familiar,” the terms which characterize Freud’s uncanny (124). At the same time, however, she is also completely unknown and unfamiliar, or *unheimlich*, insofar as this spectre of womanhood is, of course, no one real woman, but merely a feminine ideal espoused by Victorian

patriarchy. In reifying the ideal, Paulina uncannily embodies that to which women should aspire but cannot become.

Years after the appearance of *Villette*, John Ruskin in his lectures describes the paradoxical nature of the feminine ideal thus:

The perfect loveliness of a woman's countenance can only consist in that majestic peace, which is founded in the memory of happy and useful years,—full of sweet records; and from the joining of this with that yet more majestic childishness, which is still full of change and promise; — opening always—modest at once, and bright, with hope of better things to be won, and to be bestowed. There is no old age where there is still that promise—it is eternal youth. (95)

The figure of the angel in the house, as the term “angel” suggests, is not subject to the same laws of age and time as govern mortals, for the perfect woman never ages but maintains “eternal youth.” Thus the Victorian feminine ideal demands an inherent youth or “childishness” that results from a liminality and immaturity—from never completely growing up, so that one remains “still full of change and promise.” Paulina's capacity for change and fluid impressionability, then, mark her as ideally feminine.

This project will demonstrate how, despite and sometimes because of her strict adherence to the socially prescribed gender role of angel in the house, Paulina uncannily destabilizes binary oppositions and in so doing, problematizes those heterosexual relationships, which, according to traditional gender roles, define her. In the next chapter, I will explore the ways in which Paulina evinces an irreducible identity that uncannily refuses to stay put and oscillates among child and adult, human and not-human, life and

not-life. In the final chapter, I will investigate the effects this uncanny liminality has on Paulina's relationships with her father and Graham Bretton.

CHAPTER 2

PAULINA'S UNCANNY LIMINAL STATUS

Paulina at Bretton: A “very unique child”⁷

As Nicholas Royle suggests in his leading question, “Buried alive: isn’t that what a proper name is?” (143), the names we are assigned at birth entomb us in an identity that haunts us for the rest of our lives. If a proper name buries its bearer alive, in what fate has Paulina Mary Home Bassompierre been entombed? Crosby claims of Paulina and Graham: “Their weighty proper names indicate how firmly they are fixed in their proper places, and their marriage—which comes before the climax of Lucy’s story—dismisses them from a world become too complex for them” (710). While Crosby interprets Paulina’s and Graham’s “weighty proper names” as indicators of “how firmly they are fixed in their proper places” (710), I would argue that, at least in Paulina’s case, her proper name does not successfully anchor her to any one ground, but rather to a multiplicity of potentially uncanny grounds. As Georgia S. Dunbar argues, Paulina’s first name, which comes from “the Latin *Paulus*, meaning small” (80), anticipates her small stature. Paulina’s second name, Mary, hails her as a more-than-mortal woman of virtue. As Lucie Armitt suggests, Polly’s third name, Home, hints at the irony of her not being at home and her mother not being “homely” (220). This name marks Paulina for uncanniness, insofar as we can “extend this identification to claim that a woman who is not *heimlich*/homely must, by definition, be *unheimlich*/uncanny, and hence capable of haunting” (Armitt 220). Paulina’s final name, Bassompierre, links her to Marshal de Bassompierre, a French courtier born in 1579, whose autobiographical memoirs were

translated into English and published in 1819 (De Bassompierre v). Thus, it grounds her as coming from an established, well-known, and extraordinary noble family; at the same time, however, her ancestor, deemed “the most remarkable man of his age,” led a tumultuous life, which threatens to unground his descendents (xiii). Although de Bassompierre enjoyed “every species of glory” early in life, the foreword to his memoirs warns us that the “paths of glory lead but to the grave” (xiii). Because of his “attachment to the queen-mother, Mary of Medicis, and his supposed complicity in the intrigues against Richelieu,” de Bassompierre was imprisoned in the Bastille for twelve years (xiii). Taken altogether, then, Paulina’s name entombs her in the uncanny liminal position of a precocious miniature woman who is virtuous and supernatural, ironically domestic and yet not homely, glorious and still doomed to fail.

And little Polly certainly lives up to her names. From the very beginning, when Paulina’s impending presence first haunts Bretton, her precocious womanhood uncannily blurs the distinction between child and adult. That is, Paulina’s perfect and premature embodiment of the Victorian angel in the house troubles her identity, rendering her, as Armitt puts it, a “particularly disturbing character” (218). Even before Paulina herself arrives at Bretton, the new guest’s age is uncertain, as she is both baby and woman. As Armitt points out, the furnishings that arrive before Paulina “lead us to expect the arrival of a small infant” (219). And Paulina is preceded by a series of explanations that bury her alive in more expectations about, while still not completely revealing, her identity or her age. Armitt points out that Lucy’s “childhood is shrouded in mist” and that “the reason for Mrs. Bretton’s claiming her is made similarly unclear” (219). Although I agree that, “in contrast, we learn quite a lot about Polly’s background” (219), I would argue that

what we discover about the “little girl” who will soon be Lucy’s “companion” reveals information about the girl’s parents while complicating and obscuring the identity of the girl herself (6). The guest, Lucy learns, is the “daughter of a friend and distant relation of the late Dr. Bretton’s” (6). This news offers more questions than explanations, as neither the girl’s nor her father’s name is offered, nor is the exact relation specified. Moreover, the link between the guest and the Bretton family is tenuous, indeed, mediated by the friendship of a dead man. The girl’s uncertain status is made even less secure by Mrs. Bretton’s assertion that her mother had died recently, and that this “loss was not so great as might at first appear” (6). Thus, the motherless child’s human status is troubled: the text, or Mrs. Bretton, downplays her mother’s role in her life, which questions how she comes into being. The child’s departed mother, evokes the *unheimlich* in both womb and tomb, the girl’s first home, which is now gone forever. Amplifying the effect of the uncanny, the delayed and vague revelation of the dead mother’s name, Mrs. Home, denotes her as homely, or *heimlich*, but also underscores the fact that she is no longer at home. Indeed, as Armitt points out, the label of *heimlich* or *homely* does not fit the pretty mother, who, by binary logic, necessarily becomes *unheimlich* (220). Moreover, the mother’s name is not clearly connected with the mother, which troubles identity, as we see by the guesswork Lucy must do in interpreting the explanation: “Mrs. Home (Home it seems was the name) had been a very pretty, but a giddy, careless woman, who had neglected her child, and disappointed and disheartened her husband” (6). Mrs. Home’s neglect of her child underlines her troubled maternity, eerily distancing the little girl more and more from the natural origins of life. Moreover, Mrs. Home’s lack of maternal instinct hints that the little girl might inherit a preternatural maternal legacy. The dead

mother's ill repute, then, haunts the daughter and enacts a specter that precedes and invites others to predict the little girl's identity.⁸ Buried alive by the ghost of her mother's social transgressions, the little girl bears the burden, even before her appearance in the story, of having to prove that she is not like her mother, as Mrs. Bretton underscores in voicing her hope that "the child will not be like her mama; as silly and frivolous a little flirt as ever sensible man was weak enough to marry"(7). The implicit hope is that the little girl will not fail to live up to her own husband's expectations, as her mother did. Furthermore, Mrs. Bretton notes that Mr. Homes' "butterfly wife could neither comprehend nor endure" his scientific bent, suggesting that she fears the little girl might flit about like a butterfly: Paulina must learn to remain the stable support in the home for the men she loves.

Yet, in some ways, Paulina does inherit the butterfly nature of her mother: she is beautiful, not really human, and her identity is ephemeral and difficult to pin down. At the same time, unlike the butterfly, or perhaps like the butterfly in the chrysalis, Paulina is not clearly larvae or mature adult. The expectation that the little girl is an infant, as Armitt notes, is heightened by Paulina's appearance as a "shawled bundle" in the arms of the servant but almost immediately contradicted by her adult command to be put down (219). Moreover, her continued ladylike behavior confirms that Paulina is anything but a child. Indeed, she seems an adult trapped in a miniature body, as when the "creature which now appear[s] ma[kes] a deft attempt to fold the shawl; but the drapery was much too heavy and large to be sustained or wielded by those hands and arms" (8). The label of "creature" suggests that this contradiction is uncannily not human, or womanly, as the as-yet-unnamed guest seems to evade human categorization. The little girl is so strange that

she is not even a “child,” but a “creature,” a name that links her to both animal wildlife and to the creepy, living dead creature of Victor Frankenstein. Such intertextuality finds support in the Frankensteinian doubling of her science-crazed father and loss of the mother. The disconnect between the child’s physical presence and her speech further bolsters Paulina’s preternatural non-human status. Paulina’s direction to the servant appears oddly divorced from her, existing without origin as she does not speak it, but “‘Give it to Harriet, please,’ [is] then the direction” (8). The direction’s lack of origin doubles Paulina’s motherlessness, and it suggests that Paulina lacks agency or that another subject may be ventriloquizing for her. After the direction is “said,” the guest’s identity continues to resist determination, as indicated by the genderless pronoun as “it turn[s] and fixe[s] its eyes on Mrs. Bretton” (8). The gender-neutral pronoun further emphasizes both the child’s youth—that is, that she is too young to be sexed—and the animal or monster nature of the guest—that is, that it is not subject to the same gender identification as humans. At the same time, however, Paulina’s appearance as an “it” makes her all the more feminine, as it implicitly likens her to Sarah Stickney Ellis’s “relative creature” and Patmore’s “angel in the house,” both ideals which represent an unsexed status attainable, ironically enough, only through perfecting femininity.

The scene in which Mrs. Bretton and Paulina become acquainted is unsettling, insofar as the latter’s identity shifts continually. Mrs. Bretton’s first address to her new charge highlights Paulina’s uncertain status. From the beginning, Mrs. Bretton commands the new guest, instructing her, “Come and let me see if you are cold and damp: come and let me warm you at the fire” (8). These directions hint at Paulina’s uncanny lack of agency or life. Like an automaton, this creature that can understand and follow

instructions, Mrs. Bretton implies, is incapable of knowing or controlling whether she is cold and damp. Paulina then appears as a child, but only for one brief sentence: “The child advanced promptly” (8). Immediately, though, she morphs into something more than a normal child, as “relieved of her wrapping, she appear[s] exceedingly tiny; but [is] a neat, completely-fashioned little figure, light, slight, and straight” (8). Thus, the shawl functions for Paulina as the veil functions for the nun in Crosby’s reading of *Villette*, insofar as we expect that the veil or the shawl conceals the true identity of the individual behind it. Yet, as Crosby tells us, “[b]ehind the veil,” and under the shawl, I might add, “is—nothing, or something else” (714).⁹ From the wrapping that conned us into expecting an infant emerges a creature whose identity we still cannot determine. The fact that Paulina appears “completely-fashioned” undermines her earlier status as “child,” as the adjective implies that the girl has not grown naturally, but been artificially made, into her current form. Moreover, if Paulina has been “completely-fashioned” into her current form, she is the end-product; in other words, she will not mature, or be refashioned, into a woman, as a normal human child would. This also means Paulina will not metamorphose into a butterfly, as her mother did. The uncertainty remains, however, as to whether her completeness makes Paulina a miniature woman, who has bypassed childhood and come into being as sexually mature.

Paulina’s miniature perfection bridges the gap between childhood and dollhood, as she becomes a baby-doll for Mrs. Graham, as Lucy points out: “Seated on my godmother’s lap, she looked a mere doll; her neck, delicate as wax, her head of silky curls, increased, I thought the resemblance” (8).¹⁰ The resemblance to a doll calls Paulina’s life status and age into question, as she seems to have lost ownership of her

own body. The same creature who commanded the servants to do her bidding earlier, now is at the mercy of Mrs. Bretton, who “talks in little fond phrases as she chafe[s] the child’s hands, arms, and feet” (8). This treatment of the girl as if she were a baby, incapable of understanding complex sentences or sitting by herself, contradicts the earlier precociousness Paulina evinced upon first entering the house. Moreover, Mrs. Bretton’s affectionate advances suggest that Paulina holds the same fascination as a doll or baby for her new caretaker, who seems to be playing mama with her. The dialogue that follows reveals how Paulina’s identity at Bretton is formed for her. When Mrs. Bretton initially asks her name, Paulina responds “Missy,” but Mrs. Bretton does not seem satisfied with this name and urges a shift in Paulina’s identity when she asks, “But besides Missy?” (8). This very query underscores the multiplicity of Paulina’s identity, and the girl’s answer gives a nod to the extent to which her identity relies on her company: “Polly, papa calls me” (8).

Discussing her father’s absence, Polly shows signs of subjectivity and humanness, becoming overwhelmed with missing her father, as evidenced when “her eyes fill[]” (8). In a movement that gestures away from dollhood and infancy and toward a mature individuality, Paulina “dr[aws] her hand from Mrs. Bretton’s, and ma[kes] a movement to leave her lap”(8). Yet Paulina’s doll-like miniaturism haunts her as her efforts to remove herself are “at first resisted” (8). Intent on crossing the uncanny valley back into a position of agency, Paulina evinces her independence, insisting, “Please I wish to go: I can sit on a stool” (8). This assertion of desire positions Paulina as a subject, an “I,” who possesses not only desires, but also the ability to act on them.

Indeed, Paulina's retreat to a dark corner to weep evinces her precocious self-control, and reaffirms her interiority. At the same time however, her stated desire to avoid attention hints at willful self-effacement, as when she asks Lucy to "[t]ake no notice at present" (8). Retaining her diminutive doll appearance, Paulina demonstrates a mature control over the expression of her very human feelings. Enacting grief in miniature, Paulina becomes a spectacle for Lucy, who "observe[s] her draw a square-inch or two of pocket-handkerchief from the doll-pocket of her doll-skirt, and then [she hears] her weep" (9). The matching miniature handkerchief reminds us that Paulina is "completely-fashioned," replete with all the accessories a perfect doll needs, but this doll exterior is at odds with what seems at this point a sentient, sensitive interiority. Paulina's almost silent sobbing underscores the distinction between Paulina and "[o]ther children," who "in grief or pain cry aloud, without shame or restraint" (9). Paulina's decidedly unchildlike grieving, which entails "the tiniest occasional sniff," precludes her classification as either woman or child and, thus, forces Lucy to refer to her ambiguously as a "being" (9).

Much smaller than an average six-year-old child, Paulina experiences difficulty climbing stairs, although she perseveres, as "her small step toil[s] wearily up the staircase" (9). Moreover, Paulina's need for pillows to "support her little person in a sitting posture" implicitly likens her to a doll or baby, which must be propped up to sit. The minuteness of little Polly's clothing further underscores her littleness: she covers herself with a "tiny article of raiment" (9). And Paulina's mourning into and throughout the night also pushes the limits between adult and child, human and preternatural. Paulina continues to assert her individual agency, as she climbs the stairs unaided, and Lucy tells us Paulina sits hands resting with an "old-fashioned calm most unchildlike" (9). Indeed, it

seems Paulina endeavors to grow out of dollhood and childhood by controlling her body, in terms of both the expression of grief and her performance of daily tasks. She refuses to “lie down” as Lucy advises and instead sits up all night, weeping “under restraint, quietly and cautiously” (9). While these examples show that Paulina depends on others for her spiritual and mental existence, the girl also gives us reason to question whether she is a person or not. That is, Paulina cannot thermoregulate like other humans, and she eschews activities essential to human life, like eating and sleeping. Paulina, like the dead or undead, does not emit any heat; thus, she relies on Lucy for body warmth. After little Polly tells her roommate, “My bed is cold . . . I can’t warm it,” she goes to Lucy “like a small ghost gliding over the carpet” (34). And Paulina’s strange behavior throughout her stay at Bretton heightens our suspicions that she might be an automaton. Like a doll or ghost, Paulina cannot ingest food, which the scene of her at the table evidences. Because “a mug of milk [stands] before her, a morsel of bread fill[s] her hand, which l[ies] passive on the table-cloth,” we can conclude, as Lucy does, that “she [is] not eating” (11). Furthermore, as Mrs. Bretton points out, “by her looks, she has not slept” (11). Lucy confirms this suspicion, when she reports that Paulina is “still wide awake” after an hour in bed (10), and that her tiny roommate rises early to complete her toilette. Moreover, it seems that Paulina is awake throughout the night, for Lucy, “on moonlight nights, on waking,” finds her roommate kneeling and praying (12).

One possible uncanny explanation for Paulina’s failure to engage in normal life-sustaining activities is that she is a supernatural creature, either a ghost or fairy. Lucy hints that Paulina is a specter when she describes the room in which the little girl sits as “not inhabited, but haunted” (12). Paulina’s mourning continues to vex her identity,

suggesting that she is a woman's equal when it comes to grief: "She moped: no grown person could have performed that uncheering business better; no furrowed face of adult exile, longing for Europe at Europe's antipodes, ever bore more legibly the signs of home sickness than did her infant visage" (12). This homesickness underscores Paulina's uncanniness, because it depends on her being in *unheimlich*/unfamiliar surroundings. Moreover, the homesickness ages Paulina preternaturally, for she seems "growing old and unearthly," such that Lucy perceives the room in which Paulina mourns as "not inhabited but haunted" (12).

Her father's arrival revivifies Paulina, and she suddenly transforms into a living creature, driven by a "sudden eagerness, and intense expectancy" (13). No longer human, Paulina transforms from animal to inanimate object: "Like a bird or a shaft, or any swift thing, she was gone from the room" (13). Quickly, however, the text reclaims her as a miniature female, as Lucy sees her "in her black frock and tiny braided apron (to pinafores she had an antipathy), dart half the length of the street" (13). Like her speech impediment, Paulina's abnormally small stature also betrays her youth. Throughout her childhood, Paulina is described in terms of what Armitage calls "enforced and unsettling miniaturism" (219). In fact, the word "little" is used in relation to Polly twenty-nine times during the first four chapters.¹¹

With her father visiting, Paulina strives to enact the ideal of the angel in the house, waiting on her father and doing needlework for him. Enacting womanhood in miniature, Paulina struggles to complete household tasks because of her small stature, which manifests in a lack of strength. Even relatively small household objects are too large for her, as the "sugar-tongs were too wide for one of her hands, and she had to use

both in wielding them; the weight of the silver cream-ewer, the bread and butter plates, the very cup and saucer tas[k] her insufficient strength and dexterity” (15). Further reinforcing Paulina’s prematurity is Lucy’s revision of the word “child” because it is an “inappropriate and undescriptive term—a term suggesting any picture rather than that” of Paulina (15). Lucy corrects the misperception the term “child” might have encouraged in the reader by contrasting the dress that “might just have fitted a good-sized doll” and “toy work-box” to the serious womanly work the girl undertakes. If Paulina is a doll or child as her belongings suggest, she ought to be playing at sewing, but, instead she evinces a masochistic devotion to her needlework as she hems her father’s handkerchief, “pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon—swerving from her control—inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly” (15-16). Paulina’s lack of control over the sewing needle betrays her youthful lack of skill and underscores the precociousness of her “womanly” preoccupation with the task at hand. In this unsettling scene of domesticity, Paulina’s perseverance through the pain of sewing evidences her dedication to the feminine ideal. As the blood offering of “minute red dots” trace, Paulina is willing to sacrifice her body to become the angel in the house.

No matter how steadfastly Paulina seeks to embody the adult angel in the house, her lisp serves as a haunting reminder of the childhood she would repress. When Paulina meets Graham, for instance, she conducts herself according to the rules of etiquette governing young ladies. And she does not merely play at being adult: she acts as one, “deliberately” setting aside her sewing materials and “curtsying with unspeakable seriousness” (16). We can see from the “ambitious reply of the little woman” that her

diminutive size undermines her authority. Paulina's words aim to sound adult, but they fall short of their goal as the lisp mangles an otherwise grown-up response into "[t]or-rer-ably well" (16). Moreover, the fact that Paulina must descend from her "perch" undermines her sexual maturity by highlighting her small stature, as well as calls her humanness into question through subtly treating her as a bird.

The agony Paulina endures when her father departs also troubles the distinction between girl and woman, as well as the living and the dead. Mr. Home's departure both infantilizes and ages Paulina, as she becomes more emotionally experienced than many adults, going "through, in that brief interval of her infant life, emotions such as some never feel" (20). Moreover, the experience causes Lucy to question Paulina's life status, hinting that she may be on the threshold of death, for "she would have more of such instants if she lived" (20). Paulina's grief is preternatural. As she despairs, "the little creature, thus left unharrassed, [does] for herself what none other could do—contend[s] with an intolerable feeling; and, ere long, in some degree, repressed it" (20). Her extraordinary feat separates Paulina from other humans such that she seems more "creature" than human.

But the line between child and adult is not the only boundary Paulina blurs: because she is the perfect miniature woman, she troubles the distinction between living and not-living. In so doing, Paulina produces the uncanny effect of causing uncertainty as to whether she is a "real person or an automaton" (Freud 135). In her drive to embody the Victorian feminine ideal, Paulina problematizes the figure of the angel in the house by underscoring her non-human status. Just as she earlier doted on her father, so too does she tend to Graham's needs and desires. Indeed, she embodies the "natural" feminine

virtue of selfless nurturing and caring for others, as shown in her delivery of tea and food to Graham. Because Paulina “must be busy about something, look after somebody,” it seems that her caring nature *is* nature (23). Not only does she care only for others, Paulina also makes certain that her actions cannot be misconstrued as selfish, as when she “delicately refus[es] to touch” the marmalade, lest “it should appear she ha[s] procured it as much on her account as his”(23).

But her performance of the selfless angel in the house is perhaps too convincing—she is so self-effacing, she barely has a self left, as Lucy suggests: “In his absence she was still a personage, but with him the most officious, fidgetty little body possible” (25). In other words, Paulina’s agency diminishes, for, as the adjectives “officious” and “fidgetty” suggest, her actions are superfluous; that is, her attentions are neither appreciated, necessary, nor terribly efficacious. Moreover, if we take “fidgetty” to mean “disquieting,”¹² Paulina’s body becomes uncannily disturbing. Indeed, Paulina gives up her individual human status, for she neglects or refuses to “mind herself,” opting instead selflessly to serve Graham, in whom “herself [is] forgotten” (25). Like a zombie, Paulina becomes nothing more than a “body,” bereft of consciousness or soul. Indeed, it becomes increasingly difficult to pin Paulina down as a living human being, because the source of her spiritual and mental animation seems to be the men around her, as Lucy suggests: “One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now that her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham, and seemed to feel by his feelings: to exist in his existence” (25). In other words, reliant on others to give her life meaning, Paulina functions as an emotional vampire, parasite, or doll. She feeds off her host, internalizing his experiences

and living through him. The parasitic empathy that calls Paulina's human status into question, however, also marks the girl as a form of ideal Victorian femininity, for, as Stickney Ellis writes, "women can not only adapt themselves to the habits and peculiarities of others, but they can actually *feel* with them" (Poetry 116). Yet, the ability to identify with others comes at the cost of the woman's own identity, as Stickney Ellis hints in terming female sympathy a "system of self-sacrifice" (Poetry 116).

Even as Paulina lives and feels vicariously through Graham, she also becomes an object through which he can live vicariously. Positioning herself as automaton, puppet, or doll, Paulina offers her body to Graham to (re)animate as he desires. Moreover, Paulina invites Graham to treat her as an extension of his consciousness. Vampirically siphoning Graham's experience, and becoming a projection of his desires, Paulina knows what Graham knows. Thus, she serves as a tool for Graham to talk to and amuse himself, as "she would talk with him the whole evening about people she had never seen, and appear completely to realize their aspect, manners, and dispositions" (25). Evincing chameleon-like camouflaging abilities, Paulina blends into Graham's consciousness, effectively seeming an extension of him. Herein lies her attraction for Graham: like the idealized Victorian woman whom Stickney Ellis describes, Paulina demonstrates the feminine "power of adaptation," a virtue "without which she would lose half her loveliness, and half her value" (Poetry 116). Paulina's position as less than an "I" and her embodiment of adult femininity mutually undermine and reinforce each other. Further vexing Paulina's status is the reminder that this girl is still a child when she calls Lucy a "tatter-box" (27). As an anomaly in Paulina's perfect, though premature, womanhood, this speech impediment throws her precocious maturity into relief, as Lucy suggests, "her imperfect

articulation was the least precocious thing she had about her” (27). Graham underscores Paulina’s shifting identity when he links her to fairy lore, telling his mother, “Mama, I believe that creature is a changeling” (27). The assertion that Paulina is a changeling hints at her ability to adapt to Graham’s needs, as well.

The “creature,” however, is not an exclusively supernatural being: Paulina is also likened to, and acts the part of, a pet animal to Graham. She becomes, then, the “little Mousie,” the name given her by Graham (31). Thus, we see the way in which Graham shapes Paulina’s identity. She acts like a mouse, remaining underfoot, quiet, and unnoticed while Graham studies. Like a pet dog or cat, she lies on the ground next to her master, and “mute and motionless she ke[eps] that post till bed-time” (31). Moreover, Graham, does not acknowledge, let alone appreciate, his pet’s devotion. Indeed, he “wholly unconscious of her proximity—push[es] her with his restless foot” (31). Like an animal, Paulina stays out of her master’s way, moving “an inch or two” (31). Far from calling attention to herself, Paulina in her devotion dotes on her master without attracting notice, as “one little hand st[eals] out from beneath her face . . . and softly caresse[s] the heedless foot” (32).

After Paulina goes to bed, she morphs into bird. Uncannily doubling the scene of her introduction to Graham, during which the girl descends from her perch, the scene before her departure from Graham features Paulina, “all cold and vigilant, perched like a white bird on the outside of the bed” (32). Lucy’s assertion that her roommate is “not to be managed like another child” seems a vast understatement, for Paulina is more animal than human here (32). She is not, however, the same quiet, self-effacing, devoted pet she was with Graham. Instead, Paulina is creepily devoid of the warmth that signifies life and

feeling. Moreover, she does not passively press her face to the ground, but lies in wait for Lucy and “accost[s]” her (32). Bemoaning her impending detachment from Graham, Paulina attests to her parasitic existence, asserting that she cannot survive without Graham: “I cannot—*cannot* sleep: and in this way I cannot—*cannot* live!” (32). Yet implicit in this self-effacing claim of dependency is Paulina’s capacity for individual self-knowledge and desire for self-preservation, for Paulina’s lament reveals that she feels pain, which, significantly, is not what Graham feels, recognizes the torture, and wants to relieve herself of the misery that precludes a normal human existence. Uncannily, the “[d]edful miz-er-y,” or deadful misery, as I would suggest we spell it, that plagues Paulina plays with the concept of her living death. This animal is creepy and wild, not mundane and tame, as Lucy suggests in her comparison of Paulina’s behavior here to her dealings with Mrs. Bretton: “I well knew that if she [heard] Mrs. Bretton’s foot approach, she would nestl[e] quiet as a mouse under the bedclothes” (32). While the “mouse” hides, the white bird shows its “inner self” to Lucy (32). Paulina’s shifting identity, between the “eccentricities” she reveals to Lucy and the “docile, somewhat quaint little maiden” she is for Mrs. Bretton, underscores her uncanny liminality (32). Paulina undergoes a physical transformation that suggests she has been revived or possessed of inner animation. Where she was cold before, she now seems to have a fire burning inside her, as “her cheek [is] crimson; her dilated eye was both troubled and glowing, and painfully restless” (32). The source of the warmth and the glow is dangerous, and, lest the fire consume Paulina, Lucy takes her to see her beloved. Forgoing verbal language and losing the ability to walk, Paulina indicates she would like to see Graham by “stretch[ing] out her little arms to be lifted” (32). When, “[f]olding a shawl round her,” Lucy carries Paulina to

the drawing-room, Paulina regresses to the shawled bundle she was upon her arrival, effectively becoming her own double (32).

The feverish burning abates after Paulina and Graham speak and Lucy advises her not to worry about Graham not reciprocating her love. In between hosts, the parasite Paulina cannot thermoregulate or sleep. The child blurs the boundaries between life and not-life when she “can’t warm” her bed and “shivers” (34). Even to Lucy, Paulina seems more dead than alive as she goes to Lucy’s bed “like a small ghost gliding over the carpet” (34). Uncannily doubling Mrs. Bretton’s chafing of Paulina’s limbs by the fire, Lucy gives Paulina her warmth: “She was chill; I warmed her in my arms” (34). Attached to her new host, Lucy, Paulina is able to live through her and complete normal human activities. Though Paulina’s removal from Graham has left her unable to sleep or live, she has been revived, like death warmed over, and “tranquillized and cherished, she at last slumber[s]” (34). Paulina’s dependence on others sets her apart from other children and hints at her proximity to death. Indeed, Lucy notes that Paulina is a “very unique child” and wonders how she will “battle with this life” (34). That Paulina seems at odds with life underscores her uncanny strangeness and out-of-place-ness among the living. When Paulina exits the narrative scope at chapter’s end, it is not clear whether she will survive much past her departure from Bretton.

Paulina in Vilette: The Return of “what was once well known and had long been familiar”¹³

Contrary to Lucy’s doubts, Paulina proves able to “battle with this life,” at least until ten years later, when she reappears as a stranger at the theatre. In the chaos of the fire that breaks out during the “Vashti” death scene, Lucy does not recognize Paulina, so

that which was once familiar, or *heimlich*, returns as the unfamiliar, or *unheimlich*. Lucy notes that “a young girl who had been very quietly and steadily clinging to a gentleman standing before us, was suddenly struck from her protector’s arms . . . and hurled under the feet of the crowd” (261). Mirroring Paulina’s entry into and exit from the home at Bretton, her return depicts her as a girl whose existence depends on others caring for and carrying her. Unable to walk on her own, and diminutive enough in stature to be thrown about like a toy, this later Paulina doubles the shawled bundle and the little girl Graham holds aloft with one hand (17). Moreover, her position under the feet of those around her recalls the “Little Mousie” that lay on the floor to be inadvertently kicked by Graham. Seeming “unconscious” in Graham’s arms, Paulina hovers between life and death.

Further heightening the uncanny effect of this scene is the fact that Paulina still oscillates between woman and child, though she is now physically of age. Still as small as a young girl, Paulina causes intellectual uncertainty in Graham, who observes, “She is very light . . . like a child!” (262). Paulina’s inability to grow, which Armitt notes, seems to preclude the possibility of her one day reaching sexual maturity and, thus, becoming wholly adult. Paulina attempts to clear up Graham’s confusion and fix her identity on one side of the woman-girl binary opposition. When Graham asks, “Is she a child, Lucy? Did you notice her age?”, Paulina asserts her maturity: “I am not a child—I am a person of seventeen” (262). Paulina’s doubling of her childhood, however, undermines this claim of mature difference. Mirroring the girlhood misery that her departure from Graham to be with her father occasioned, pain accompanies the hand-over from Graham to her father, as “in the exchange from one bearer to another she [is] hurt, and moan[s] again” (262).

Still the familiar delicate doll or baby, Paulina “must be touched very tenderly” and cannot undress herself. Undressing the once familiar stranger, Lucy marvels at the girl’s preterhuman perfection, for Paulina remains, like the “completely-fashioned” miniature person she was in her infancy, a “small, delicate creature, but made like a model” (264). Thus, the girl being disrobed for Graham’s medical examination eerily duplicates the female wax anatomical models known as “Venuses,” which were “strangely presented in the language of erotic art” (Warner 49). The comparison fits Paulina well, for she, like the Venuses, becomes the object of both erotic desire and medical study. Further strengthening the connection between “small, delicate” Paulina and these wax anatomical models is the small scale of the “Little Venus” displayed in Bologna (Warner 49). Part of the beauty of the Venus, and, by extension, of Paulina, is that she can remain seemingly true to life despite distortions in size. Indeed, Paulina, like a model, is perfect down to the last anatomical detail, as “her skin [is] perfectly fair, the neck and hands veined finely like the petals of a flower; a thin glazing of the ice of pride polishe[s] this delicate exterior”(264). In addition to underscoring Paulina’s similarity to a wax anatomical model, this description suggests the crafting of a fine porcelain doll. Beginning with the “perfectly fair” surface of the porcelain, adding a layer of color, and finishing with the glaze, the process of crafting a porcelain doll, and Paulina, is artificial. The implicit comparison supports the assertion that Paulina is “made” rather than born into the embodiment of the Victorian feminine ideal.

The fine porcelain doll Lucy admires becomes the plaything Miss Fanshawe derides. When Lucy asks Ginevra whether the Brettons visited Mr. Home’s residence, Ginevra answers in the affirmative: “Ay, ay! as large as life; and missy played the

hostess. What a conceited doll it is!" (270). The use of "missy," the name by which the infant little Polly tells us her father calls her, serves as reminder that Paulina is still the same father-identified girl she was ten years earlier. Moreover, Ginevra's ridicule of Paulina's domestic efforts uncannily doubles Lucy's mockery of Paulina's "absurd" tea-time attentions at Bretton (15). As Lucy did earlier when describing the difficulty with which tiny Paulina handled the silver and china, Ginevra underscores the disparity in size that makes Paulina an unfit hostess. In contrast to her guests, who appear "large as life," Paulina is a mere doll—a miniature without the agency that marks human life. Paulina's dollhood underscores her uncanny inability to function as a real woman, for, as a doll, Paulina can only "play," not *be*, the hostess. Moreover, insofar as she refers to Paulina as "missy," Ginevra implies that her cousin remains the same father-identified child who arrived at Bretton ten years earlier. For Ginevra, then, Paulina still cannot perform the role of normal adult female.

Both girl and woman, fine anatomical model and wax doll, the older Paulina promises to have just as fluid and liminal an identity as the younger Paulina. Indeed, Paulina's "changeling" status still haunts her, as she continues to be associated with fairies, as Armitt notes. Lucy describes Paulina in ethereal and mysterious terms as "something dressing itself—an airy, fairy thing—small, slight, white—a winter spirit" (274). The adult Paulina's clothing, which is "white, sprinkled slightly with drops of scarlet," doubles the blood-spotted cambric of the Bretton days (275). Doubling her assertion years earlier that Paulina haunts the room at Bretton, Lucy again perceives Paulina as a possible haunting presence at La Terrasse and cannot decide if the young woman is "[s]pectral or not" (275). Lucy's conversation with Paulina before dinner

corroborates this claim to maturity. When Lucy asks her companion if she is “little Polly,” Paulina asserts her adulthood by responding that she is “Paulina Mary Home Bassompierre” (276). Lucy’s reaction to her interlocutor’s appearance further attests to Paulina’s womanly transformation, when Lucy marvels, “How time can change! Little Polly had worn in her pale, small features, her fairy symmetry, her varying expression, a certain prominence of interest and grace; but Paulina Mary was become beautiful” (276). At this moment, Paulina seems to have outgrown and surpassed her precocious childhood. Moreover, Paulina emits a “subdued glow from the soul outward” that suggests Paulina is a personage in her own right. At the same time, this inner “flame” is uncannily reminiscent of the frightening fever that nearly consumed the girl her final night at Bretton. Further heightening the sense of the uncanny surrounding Paulina, this lamp metaphor also subtly undermines the reassertion of the girl’s human individuality: “This was not an opaque vase, of material however costly, but a lamp chastely lucent, guarding from extinction, yet not hiding from worship, a flame vital and vestal” (276). By comparing the girl to a man-made instrument, this comparison casts doubt on Paulina’s naturalness and agency. Furthermore, the metaphor links Paulina back to the doll, for while the “opaque vase” may well be porcelain, Paulina is “lucent,” that is, translucent, like the finest porcelain, or luminous, like a well-formed wax doll. The image of a flame inside a wax figure is a troubling one, indeed, and one which hints that Paulina defies the laws of nature. She subjugates fire, a dangerous natural force, to wax, an artificial substance that normally serves to fuel the fire.

Indeed, Ruskin’s description of the way in which a “check” to a girl’s tenderness “takes away the brightness from the eyes of innocence” echoes the way in which

Paulina's flame, which burned out from her eyes when she was young, is now contained behind a cool exterior (95). The "check" here is the suffering Paulina felt from her separation from her father and Graham, as well as from the "[d]edful miz-er-y" she experienced when she perceived that Graham did not return her love (32). This check of childhood anguish leaves a permanent impression on Paulina. As Ruskin points out, this impressionability is a part of a "good girl's nature," for "there is not one check you give to her instincts of affection or effort—which will not be indelibly written on her features, with a hardness" (94-5). Paulina, like wax, takes a deep imprint, and like porcelain, exhibits extreme strength in keeping the original form. Thus, Lucy errs in assuming that Paulina "must, long ere this, have outgrown the impressions with which joy and grief, affection and bereavement, stamped [her] mind ten years ago" (276). Moreover, unlike most humans, who grow up and lose to a certain extent their earlier experiences, Paulina uncannily adds to, but never outgrows, her childhood, as she asserts, "The child of seven years lives yet in the girl of seventeen" (277). With this statement, Paulina not only evinces a split self; she also refuses to fix herself on either side of the child-adult binary. When Mr. Home admits of his daughter that he "would not answer for her being quite cannie" and deems her a "strange little mortal," he recognizes Paulina's uncanny liminality and reinforces her miniaturism (280).

While her own words make the relationship explicit, Paulina's actions suggest her connection with the girl who stabs herself repeatedly attempting needlework. Although she's "swift and skilful" at sewing now, she has the "same busy knitting of the brow, the same dainty mannerisms, the same quick turns and movements" (289). Paulina's concomitant mature difference and retention of childhood traits reveal that she is

uncannily as much the childish woman as she was earlier the precocious girl. Despite her earlier disavowal of childhood, Paulina evidences here that she occupies a liminal status, blurring the boundaries between child and adult. Paulina continues to oscillate between girl and woman throughout the novel. At La Terrasse, for instance, Paulina performs an abrupt switch in character once her father leaves:

all the child left her; with us, more nearly her companions in age she rose at once to the little lady: her very face seemed to alter; that play of feature, and candour of look, which, when she spoke to her father, made it quite dimpled and round, yielded to an aspect more thoughtful, and lines distincter and less mobile. (287)

In an instant, Paulina undergoes a behavioral and physiological transformation from a bubbly, baby-faced “child” to a serious, austere-visaged “little lady,” recalling the Paulina who grew “old and unearthly” mourning her father’s departure from Bretton (12). Paulina’s instantaneous puberty, which serves as both a regression to her unchildlike childhood and an age-progression to mature womanhood, disturbs Graham, who engages in the conversation “not quite with his usual ease” (287). Paulina answers him “in quite womanly sort; with intelligence, with a manner not indeed so wholly individualized” (287). Unable to maintain this purely adult status long, Paulina gradually morphs back into a child, as “a tone, a glance, here and there, rather animated and quick than measured and stately, still recalled little Polly” (287-8). Soon, she regains her “dimpling smile” and, more telling yet, “she lisp[s] once, and forg[ets] to correct herself” (278). Lucy notes that Paulina’s level of maturity varies with her company: “With her father she was really

still a child, or child-like, affectionate, merry, and playful. With me she was serious, and as womanly as thought and feeling could make her” (299).

Indeed, Paulina’s lisp, which she struggled to repress as a girl, serves as a haunting reminder of the “girl of seven years” within her. We see from Paulina’s self-correction that this vestigial speech imperfection is uncanny in the sense Schelling sets forth—that is, it is something long familiar, which should have remained hidden but has come to light. Ashamed of her haunting lisp, Paulina “colour[s] whenever such lapse occur[s], and in painstaking, conscientious manner, quite as amusing as the slight error, repeat[s] the word more distinctly” (288). Paulina does not merely seek to correct her speech impediment, however; she outright denies its existence when her father informs her “there is a little flutter, a little tendency to stammer now and then, and even to lisp as you lisped when you were six years old” (301). Despite evidence to the contrary, Paulina insists, “I can pronounce all the letters of the alphabet as clearly as you can” (301). Thus, Paulina preserves her liminal status as both child and adult through denying the haunting girlhood lisp, which surfaces nevertheless, linking Paulina and Little Polly.

Just as she did ten years earlier at Bretton, Paulina still maintains her association with the fairy world. Whereas M. de Bassompierre accuses his daughter of being a “Highland fairy” (280), tutor Anna Braun recognizes that her student is supernatural, as she “half-fear[s], half-worship[s] Paulina, as a sort of dainty nymph—an Undine” (303). The comparison to an Undine alludes to Friedrich Heinrich Karl De la Mott Fouqué’s novel *Undine*, which follows the tale of Undine, a water spirit raised by a fisherman and his wife. Because Undine really is the foster child switched at birth with the couple’s biological daughter, the allusion strengthens Paulina’s association with fairies and affirms

Graham's suspicion that the girl is a "changeling" (27). Moreover, the comparison with Undine heightens the sense that Paulina's very existence relies on her ability to attach herself to a man, for Undine gains a soul only in marriage. Just as Undine comes closer to human status through marriage, so too must she leave the earthly realm of mortals when her husband rejects and forgets her (De la Mott Fouqué 90). Anna Braun's comments, then, echo the threat that Paulina's unrequited love for Graham posed to her existence ten years earlier. Furthermore, the allusion suggests, albeit falsely, that Graham will reject Paulina after their marriage.

Anna Braun, not Paulina, makes the allusion to Undine. Similarly, Paulina's inadvertent lisp suggests she lacks control over her own doubleness. When Lucy implies that Paulina is too young to know anything of love, however, Paulina reveals in no uncertain terms that she purposefully doubles her identity. In a mature tone, she tells Lucy, "It may be well for papa to look on me as a baby: I rather prefer he should thus view me; but *you* know and shall learn to acknowledge that I am verging on my nineteenth year" (304). In other words, she maintains the right to be infantile with her father and womanly with Lucy. Paulina's concealment of her state doubles the multiplicity, or duplicity, she exhibited earlier at Bretton, when she hid her feelings from Mrs. Bretton but revealed them to Lucy. Just as she would have had Mrs. Bretton view her as a child who does not suffer from the torment of unrequited love, so too would she keep her father under the illusion that she never thinks about the misery of love.

When Paulina reveals her love for Graham to Lucy, Paulina describes herself metonymously in animalistic terms, as she shares how when she read Graham's letter, her "heart did more than throb—it trembled fast—every quiver seemed like the pant of an

animal athirst, laid down at a well and drinking” (375). Her heart, then, is an animal on the brink of expiration whose life depends on the water of Graham’s love. Continuing the trope of reliance on water, and diminishing her own agency even more, Paulina likens herself to a plant, which has no control over its life whatsoever. Paulina describes her passive existence to Lucy: “I am not endeavouring, nor actively good, yet God has caused me to grow in the sun, due moisture, and safe protection, sheltered, fostered, taught, by my dear father; and now—now—another comes. Graham loves me” (375). Thus, Paulina underscores her uncanny liminality through rendering herself devoid of all agency. Her plant metaphor reveals just what a relative creature she is, for everything has been decided and provided for her, and she derives her animation from God, favorable circumstances, and Graham.

Yet her plant metaphor represses half of the truth, for as we know, Paulina has known sorrow, and her ability to decide what to do about the letter reveals that she is not as passive as she depicts herself. Indeed, Lucy believes that Paulina’s pretense of inaction, figured earlier as porcelain or wax and in this dialogue as ice, belies a vital passion and agency, represented throughout the novel as fire. Paulina effectively freezes Graham’s epistolary intercourse with her, making of his well of water a reply that “resemble[s] a morsel of ice flavoured with ever so slight a zest of fruit or sugar” (375). The ice serves as a preservative, protecting her chastity and keeping her sexual passion or agency from being extinguished or from incinerating her life. Lucy commends Paulina on her ability to freeze her passion and Graham’s advances: “Paulina, that gentle hoar-frost of yours, surrounding so much pure, fine flame, is a priceless privilege of nature” (376). Such a depiction of Paulina’s flame recalls her childhood fever and the description of her

as porcelain guarding a flame. The image of the frost surrounding flame, against the background of the plant metaphor, suggests Paulina's autonomy, for, if she possesses an inner light and outer ice, she becomes self-sufficient and has no need for the sun or water. Moreover, the dichotomy of fire and ice demonstrates Paulina's uncanny ability to embody both sides of a polar opposition. The image's antithetical nature marks Paulina's identity as uncannily unstable and preternatural. That is: frost and flame do not usually occur together in nature, for fire threatens to melt ice, which would then extinguish the fire, and ice threatens to extinguish or quench fire. If Paulina can keep her courtship with Graham on ice, so to speak, she can achieve a state of suspended animation that enables her to maintain her liminal position as both helpless baby in her father's care and sexually mature lady to be courted. The danger of the ice melting, of course, is that the delicacy will rot or the flame will blaze up uncontrollably and cease to be "pure." In short, if she allows her cool reserve to thaw, Paulina will lose her chaste appeal, and Graham will no longer wish to wed her. Yet, if anyone can halt the progress of time and preserve herself, it is Paulina, who has managed to maintain the girl within her.

Recalling Paulina's plant metaphor, Lucy encourages Paulina to give up her individual agency and to abstain from telling her father about the courtship, and, thus, maintain the protective frost that safeguards the freeze-frame of liminality. Lucy advises her to "[l]eave the revelation to Time and your kind Fate" (376). Moreover, Lucy's elaboration upon Paulina's comparison looks forward to Paulina's future, and implies that it is already determined. Indeed, because "Providence" has ordained it, Paulina has little choice but to marry Graham, as Lucy tells her, "You must be united" (377). Lucy predicts a preternaturally blessed union: the couple shall "live in peace and be happy—not as

angels, but as few are happy amongst mortals” (377). Indeed, this comparison underscores again Paulina’s lack of agency and her uncanny status as not quite human. Moreover, Lucy’s assertion that Paulina’s blessed life is the “attesting trace and lingering evidence of Eden” reinforces and doubles Paulina’s uncanny ability to freeze, and thus preserve, the pure flame within her. Woman and child, fire and ice, sexually mature and innocent, Paulina can inhabit the past and attest to the innocence before the fall. Her uncanny position as both pre- and postlapsarian situates Paulina as eternally on Stickney Ellis’s “verge of womanhood” (Poetry 119). Through preserving the girl within her, Paulina can retain her liminal status as the girl-woman “fresh as it were from the garden of Eden, while the loveliness of her first creation is still lingering around her, blended with the melancholy symbols of her fall” (Poetry 120). At the same time, however, the sexual maturity that functions as the “melancholy symbols of the fall” suggests that Paulina’s icy exterior can only defer, not prevent, her unfortunate fate.

Haunted by its title, the chapter “Sunshine” recalls Paulina’s plant existence and Lucy’s sunny forecast for her romantic future. Just as when she was little, Paulina depends on Graham to animate her, as the following passage implies: “Graham had a wealth of mirth by nature; Paulina possessed no such inherent flow of animal spirits—unstimulated, she inclined to be thoughtful and pensive—but now she seemed merry as a lark; in her lover’s genial presence, she glowed like some soft glad light” (423). Devoid of the “inherent flow of animal spirits,” Paulina lacks the movement that separates fauna from flora. Without Graham, Paulina remains immobile, like a plant; with Graham, on the other hand, Paulina graduates up the biological hierarchy of life to regain the bird status she evinced at Bretton, becoming “merry as a lark.” Paulina’s new soft glow

reveals the problematic nature of her reliance on Graham for animation. Paulina's fire comes to the surface as her ice melts: "As to that gentle ice of hers—that reserve on which she depended; where was it now? Ah! Graham would no longer bear it; he brought with him a generous influence that soon thawed the timid, self-imposed restriction" (424). Yet Graham's melting of her protective frost also dampens the flame. Wet by the melting ice and exposed to the elements, the flame cannot blaze forth but only glow softly. As the flame's inability to prosper outside the protective ice suggests, Graham's presence now restricts Paulina's selfhood, replacing Paulina's "timid, self-imposed restriction," or freezing of her inner passion.

CHAPTER 3

PAULINA'S HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Daddy's Girl

So far I've demonstrated that Paulina uncannily blurs the boundaries between child and adult, alive and not-alive, human and not-human. Here, beginning with the father-daughter bond, I will explore what it means for Paulina's relationships with men that her unstable identity remains contingent on others. Armitage recognizes that Paulina and her father share a "deeply damaged" relationship (222), and I would argue that the dysfunction in their relationship stems from the uncanny liminality that results from Paulina's commitment, both compulsory and voluntary, to the feminine ideal. Whereas little Polly's bond with her father proves unsettling in the girl's flirtatious, possessive, self-effacing devotion to her father, their relationship ten years later disturbs because of the father's possessive denial of his daughter's sexual maturity.

Since little Polly too perfectly embodies adult womanhood, her reunion with her father at Bretton before he leaves the country reveals a disturbingly erotic undercurrent. When Paulina runs out to meet her father in the street, he removes her from the public eye and literally envelopes her, as the girl is "caught up, and rapt at once from my cool observation, and from the wondering stare of the passengers" (13). Thus, the two seem to form a self-sufficient, interdependent union. Indeed, Polly is all papa needs, and papa is all Polly needs, as they define their being in terms of each other's ownership. Mr. Home asks, "And how is papa's Polly?", a question that Polly mirrors, replying, "How is Polly's

papa?” (13). Here, father and daughter share a moment of reciprocal desire that recalls Lacanian Desire of the Mother, which takes place after the baby sees itself reflected in a mirror or in the actions of its mother and begins to develop a sense of self. At this stage, the baby perceives itself to be in an idealized union, in which mother and child mutually complete each other. Armit, too, picks up on this mirroring and interdependence, noting that in this scene, “this shadow-self emerges, but through a reverse dynamic in which, far from estranging itself from him, it rarely leaves his side” (220). But this perfect union appears incestuously creepy, because Paulina is not, or not only, an infant. As both woman and little girl, Paulina evinces a desire for her father that is neither clearly innocent nor sexual. Indeed, Lucy describes their familial happiness in terms of what Armit deems “nauseating flirtatiousness” (221), as a “scene of feeling too brimful, and which, because the cup did not foam up high or furiously overflow, only oppressed one the more” (13). The cup suggests a pleasure that is just barely contained. Mr. Home’s desire for his daughter shows in the “feeling in his eye, and emotion in his now agitated countenance” (14). The consummation of their union occurs in the kiss Polly initiates when she demands of her father, “Kiss Polly” (14). Moreover, the father’s kiss becomes unsettlingly eroticized, so that Lucy “wish[es] she would utter some hysterical cry, so that [Lucy] might get relief and be at ease” (14). Yet Paulina does not verbalize her pleasure; instead, she “ma[kes] wonderfully little noise: she seem[s] to have got what she wanted—all she wanted, and to be in a trance of content”(14). Such euphoria hints at orgasm or post-coital bliss.

Even later, once the sexual tension has dissipated, Paulina’s attentions to her father reveal her self-effacing desire to possess him as she performs as angel in the house.

While he ignores her, she occupies herself with him, and “seeing that he continue[s] to talk, apparently unconscious of her return, she t[akes] his hand, open[s] the unresisting fingers, insinuate[s] into them the handkerchief, and close[s] them upon it one by one” (14). Paulina’s ability to manipulate her father’s body underscores the degree to which father and daughter are interdependent and perform complementary roles that, together, comprise the functions of a single being. Mr. Home is responsible for speaking, while Paulina’s domain is physical action. At the same time, this union is an unequal because the father overlooks Paulina’s contribution: she devotes herself to him, while he “seem[s] not to see or feel her” (14). Although her father continues unaware, Paulina prevents anyone else from attending to him. Jealously guarding her father from competition, Paulina instructs Warren to place her chair “between papa and Mrs. Bretton” (14). Asserting her possession of her father, Paulina says, “*I must hand his tea*” (14). As much as Paulina seeks to perform perfect adult femininity in caring for her father, her “attentions” are “rather absurd” because of her diminutive size (15). She struggles with the sugar-tongs and the “weight of the silver cream-ewer,” but her father remains “blind” to the precocious absurdity of her efforts (15). “[P]erfectly content to let her wait on him,” Mr. Home tacitly encourages his daughter’s devotion to caring for him as if she were an adult woman or pet (15).

Moreover, Mr. Home and Polly are almost inseparable during his visit at Bretton. Mr. Home cannot “be prevailed on to go out,” presumably because he wants to spend every second with his daughter (19). Polly is either on his knee or on a “carpet or stool just at ‘papa’s’ feet” (19). When she is not showering him with physical attention, instead of playing, as a child might, she works for her father. The “scarlet-speckled

handkerchief” returns to haunt father and child, reminding us of the bodily sacrifice Paulina’s selflessness necessitates and foreboding the blood sacrifice Paulina demands when living vampirically off her father and Graham, as I noted in Chapter 2. As much as she stabs herself while making the keepsake, Paulina may not neglect her duties, for the “demand on the sempstress’s industry . . . was stringent” (19). Through his silence on the matter, Mr. Home condones his daughter’s masochistic labors for him.

Indeed, because of his daughter’s precocity, Mr. Home makes demands of her that he, as an adult, cannot fulfill. For instance, he asks Paulina to control her emotions though he cannot control his. The stoicism he demands from her is not natural or human, but more automaton or doll. Mr. Home instructs his daughter, “Polly must be cheerful: not cry at parting; not fret afterwards. She must look forward to meeting again, and try to be happy meanwhile” (22). Thus, he is complicit in forming her into a daughter who hides her feelings from her father to preserve him: “Her father sob[s], but she, I remar[k], d[oes] not” (22).

In a reversal of Mr. Home’s premature treatment of little Polly as an adult, the father denies Paulina sexual maturity ten years later. Armitt recognizes this unhealthy family dynamic, noting that “[c]hild and parent clutch to each other so compulsively that Mr. Home refuses to allow himself to see Polly’s increasing maturity, a refusal she both permits and encourages, even though she privately claims to Lucy she finds it stifling” (222). Paulina’s uncertain age haunts her, as she cannot entertain proposals of marriage unless she is sexually mature. Indeed, if she submits to be forever the child her father sees, she will never be able to leave him, and her adult life will be nothing more than a continuation, or doubling, of her childhood.

Most disturbing of all, perhaps, Polly perpetuates her father's delusions that she is still a young girl. Doting on her father as she did in girlhood, Paulina encourages him to view her as the same little Polly. Her reception of him at La Terrasse, for instance, doubles their reunion at Bretton. She greets her father with equal joy, showering him with attention. When he enters, the "little white Countess dance[s] in a circle about her equally white sire, clapping her hands and crying,—'Papa, papa, you look like an enormous polar bear'" (279). In so playfully celebrating his return, Paulina of age acts more the child than did little Polly, but this scene recalls the flirtatious dynamic between father and daughter, which I earlier compared to Lacanian Desire of the Mother. When Paulina identifies her father as a polar bear, she, in turn, becomes his prey, the "little chamois"—thus, father and daughter again rely on each other for their respective identities. Paulina's and her father's animal status here also doubles the erotic hunting games with Graham at Bretton, though Paulina here willfully casts herself as the victim that taunts the would-be predator. As in their intimate reunion scene at Bretton, Paulina and her father consummate their relationship with a kiss, which she again instigates, this time "st[anding] on tiptoe to reach his lips for a kiss"(280). The climactic moment recalls the brimful cup, for Paulina exhibits a postcoital glow, as "there shine[s] around her a halo of loving delight" (280). Indeed, Paulina's performance of babylike dependency on her father is so convincing that Mr. Home tells Mrs. Bretton, "She neither grows in wisdom nor in stature. Don't you find her pretty nearly as much the child as she was ten years ago?"(280). Whereas Little Polly must look at her father when he is seated, Paulina's ability to kiss her father while he stands indicates she has grown.

The very next evening, however, Paulina has uncannily changed from the baby dependent on the parent to the nurturer in the relationship. No longer the enchanting, childish elf, Paulina acts the mature woman as she greets her father with “no dance of welcome” and demonstrates her control over him (291). Indeed, she now seems to be the animating force behind her father as she determines his actions upon his arrival, for “[i]t was with a sort of gravity that she took immediate possession of her father, as he entered the room; but she made him her entire property, led him to the seat of her choice, and, while softly showering round him honeyed words of commendation for being so good and coming home so soon, you would have thought it was entirely by the power of her little hands he was put in the chair, and settled and arranged” (291). Thus, Paulina underscores her ownership of her father, suggesting that the two still share a bond like Lacanian Desire of the Mother. That is, Mr. Home is still “Polly’s papa” (13). This scene doubles her possessive care of him at Bretton, yet this time around her womanly service is not precocious. Indeed, far from being “absurd” and useless as at Bretton, Paulina’s attentions are now too perfect to be deemed appropriate. Rather, they are preternaturally effective, for Paulina seems to control Mr. Home’s body, although she is far too little to do so physically. She and her father share a union so complete that her wishes determine his actions—he is, again or still, the “Polly’s papa” of ten years ago. Indeed, the masochistically erotic pleasure of this scene, haunted by the precocious, but now creepy desire to serve and possess, suggests an unhealthy reversal of roles, for “the strong man seemed to take pleasure in wholly yielding himself to this dominion—potent only by love”(291). That is, the papa who determined his daughter’s existence before here gives

up himself to her subjectivity, as she babies him, gently manipulating him with praise and the “honeyed words of commendation” (291).

“Premature Love for Graham Bretton”

If Polly’s blurring of the boundaries between girl and woman complicates her relationship with her father, so too does it problematize her love for Graham. In keeping with her precocious maturity, though at odds with her biological age, little Polly exhibits what Jacobus terms “premature love for Graham Bretton” (43). Ten years older than the “young lady” who has come to visit, Graham begins to court Paulina nonetheless. While this age discrepancy matters little to the couple ten years later, when Paulina has finally reached the biological age of a “young lady,” a romantic relationship between a sixteen-year old and a six-year old would certainly be taboo. Nevertheless, Paulina’s liminal status between girl and woman seems to invite Graham’s attentions. Addressing her as “Miss Home”—that is, as if she were sexually mature—Graham introduces himself as her “slave, Graham Bretton” (16). While Graham at first positions himself as being at Paulina’s service, he soon reveals that he plans to use her for his own pleasure, as he tells her, “I reckon on being able to get out of you a little of that precious commodity called amusement, which mama and Mistress Snowe there fail to yield me” (17). Thus begins a game of courtship, in which Graham aggressively pursues Paulina, and she refuses him. As precocious suavity gives way to flirtatious teasing, Graham insinuates that the new guest might take a romantic interest in him: “A little thing like you ought have been in bed many hours ago, but you probably sat up in the expectation of seeing me?” (17). Paulina denies this accusation, but Graham, unwilling to accept the rebuff to his advances, persists, this time explicitly asserting that Paulina desires to see him: “You

certainly wished to enjoy the pleasure of my society. You knew I was coming home, and would wait to have a look at me” (17). Thus, Graham situates Paulina as the sexual aggressor who would objectify him for pleasure, but Paulina insists her affections are reserved for another male: her father. In a move that places Graham as seducer, Graham points out his intentions to win Paulina from her father, announcing, “I am going to be a favourite: preferred before papa, I dare say” (17). In challenging her devotion to her father, Graham’s attentions double those he later gives as a suitor.

Taking advantage of Paulina’s baby or doll stature, Graham seizes physical control of her when he “ca[tches] her up with one hand, and with that one hand h[olds] her poised aloft above his head” (17). In a scene that both underscores Paulina’s lack of agency and reinforces her subjectivity, the victim of Graham’s impropriety “s[ees] herself thus lifted up on high, in the glass over the fireplace” (17). With the mirroring showing her what is happening to her body, Paulina becomes overwhelmed by the “suddenness, the freedom, the disrespect of the action” (17). Scandalized by Graham’s antics, Paulina seeks to shame her attacker into releasing her, and thus regain control over her own person: “‘For shame, Mr. Graham!’ was her indignant cry, ‘put me down!’” (18).

Because Paulina is not clearly a little girl and because Graham has cast their relationship as a courtship, Graham’s abduction of her becomes inappropriate and echoes rape. Yet Paulina’s problematic status between woman and child and human and not-human partly justifies Graham’s treatment of her as a baby, animal, or inanimate object. Moreover, Paulina’s depiction of the action further underscores her muddled identity and confuses her place in her relationship with Graham, when she asks Graham to imagine a reversal of the dynamic: “I wonder what you would think of me if I were to treat you in that way,

lifting you with my hand as Warren lifts the little cat?” (18). The comparison, which she seems to intend to assert her status as a subject, actually likens her to a pet animal, which, in turn, suggests that Graham’s treatment is fitting.

Despite Paulina’s rejection of his advances, and her subsequent “distant and haughty demeanour” (19), Graham’s seduction of the little lady continues. Indeed, his efforts to win her heart are portrayed in eroticized terms, as he “endeavour[s] to seduce her attention by opening his desk and displaying its multifarious contents” (19). And the precocious womanly child cannot help but be attracted by his seduction, as she gives in to “this powerful temptation” (19). Playing on Paulina’s childish desire to preserve a picture of a dog, Graham demands an erotic gift, a “kiss,” in exchange (20). Graham’s demand for sexual payment reveals his sexual desire for her and casts Paulina as sex object, or even prostitute, who must sell her body to get what she wants. This particular scene of seduction does not achieve the desired effect, as Paulina does not willingly succumb but takes the picture and runs away. Still, Paulina’s precocious womanhood leaves her enmeshed in a sexual economy: returning to the protection of her father, she “abscond[s] a debtor, dart[s] to her father, and [takes] refuge on his knee” (20). But her union with her father does not guarantee the safety of her chastity and honor, for Graham pursues her to her father’s knee to “kiss the hand” as payment for the picture. Again, Paulina fends off his advances, as she hits him, “deal[ing] him payment in a small coin that was not kisses” (21). Yet Paulina’s “miniature fist,” which suggests she is a mere doll or baby, won’t let us forget that her maturity and even her humanness are not secure. If she is a doll or baby, why shouldn’t Graham do with her what he wishes? Paulina’s childish lack of experience allows Graham to deceive her into believing his fake injury, while Paulina’s womanly

emotional weakness and nurturing nature make her pity him. Tricked into blaming herself for Graham's injury, Paulina apologizes and "then succeed[s] emotion, faltering, weeping" (21). Her reaction underscores her human capacity for feeling, while at the same time hinting at her lack of subjectivity, for she is less an agent and more the occasion on which this show of guilt occurs. Again, Paulina's minuteness and lack of control over her person come to the fore as, in another abduction scene, Graham "snatche[s] her aloft, and she again punishe[s] him" (21). In a perverse doubling of Paulina's earlier comparison of herself to a "little cat" held up in one hand, she tugs at her aggressor's "lion's locks" (21). Like the vain struggles of a large cat's defenseless prey, her attempts to save herself are futile.

Once Paulina's father leaves, however, she no longer has the strength to fight Graham's seduction scheme. When Graham picks her up she "[does] not resist" but "nestle[s] in his arms, as if weary" (23). Moreover, she gives in to his sexual advances, allowing him to "carr[y] her upstairs to bed" (22). From this point onward, Paulina is in love with Graham and, as if she were his wife, transfers the attentions she previously gave her father to him. Living up to the ideal of the angel in the house, Paulina serves him self-effacingly: "herself was forgotten in him: he could not be sufficiently well waited on, nor carefully enough looked after" (25). Like a faithful wife, Polly pledges to remain devoted to Graham until she dies, promising him, "[I]f you were to die . . . I should 'refuse to be comforted, and go down into the grave to you mourning'" (29). This assertion, which compares her love for Graham to Jacob's love for Joseph, elevates their love to Biblical status. At the same time, the allusion complicates the nature of the children's relationship, as Graham, who, husband-like, replaces Mr. Home as the male

authority in Paulina's life, functions here as Paulina's son. Their premature union is soon dissolved, however, in a twisted reversal of a bride's exchange from father to husband. When Polly returns from Graham to her father, the young lovers share a passionate farewell, as Graham kisses "her little hot face and burning lips" (32). Further underscoring the premature sexual nature of their love, Graham reiterates his victory over her love for her father: "Polly, you care for me more than for papa, now—" (32).

When Paulina appears again, her liminality still troubles her relationship with Graham. Their reunion is haunted by the past, as his carrying of her unconscious body mirrors his bringing her upstairs in Bretton ten years earlier. Immediately, then, the couple's sexual past comes to the fore, made more uncannily familiar and unfamiliar by Graham's perception of her as a child and a stranger. Moreover, the ocular pleasure Graham and his actions afforded her as a child persists, as her "large eyes settl[e] on his face like the solemn eyes of some pretty wondering child" (264).

Indeed, once Graham and Paulina recognize each other as old playmates, they pick up where they left off at Bretton. Armitt describes the way in which Graham infantilizes the grown-up Paulina, as he "encountering this potential child-bride, plays children's games with her to reassure himself he can remain in control, babying her in refusing her the wine in favour of imbibing 'dew'" (221). Graham's treatment of Paulina as a child both reverses and echoes his earlier treatment of her—whereas he had sexualized the little girl, he now babies the mature woman, but neither mode of treatment is age-appropriate. Paulina's liminal status between woman and girl, or as girl in woman, however, makes it nearly impossible to determine what treatment would be appropriate.

Indeed, this seduction scheme doubles Graham's earlier ruse with the dog picture, though as Armitt points out, Paulina no longer acts as the victim. For Armitt, "it is Graham who acts as increasingly charmed (in both senses), the gradually tipping vessel imitating the shifting balance of power" (221), yet it is not clear that Paulina gains control over the relationship or that the vessel represents (only) the balance of power. Indeed, Paulina demands the draught to assert not only her "mortal privileges," as Lucy notes, but also her sexual maturity. Ultimately, the wassail emphasizes Paulina's uncanny liminality, as she demands the "profanatory beverage," which implies that she is pure or to be treated with reverence, though her earlier figurative rape and seduction by Graham have already profaned her. Moreover, this scene revolves around Paulina's preternatural status, which links to her eternal youth. Indeed, Dr. John enjoys the "fairy's dance," for it "set[s] *him* at ease: again she seem[s] a child for him—again, almost his playmate" (281). Perversely, it is this very "child-like lightheartedness" that reawakens Graham's desire for Paulina (281). Her uncannily girlish womanhood, the inverse and complement of her precocious womanhood, encourages Graham to redouble his teasing advances. As he first denied her the dog-picture, so too does he withhold the ale, seducing Paulina. Furthermore, he uses Paulina's small stature to his advantage, placing the cup where she can't reach it. In this flirtatious game, the cup mirrors the cup of pleasure that Paulina shares with her father. But this whole exchange turns on the fact that Paulina is here the child or fairy. Graham seems sexually aroused by the way she looks up at him "exactly with the countenance of a child that longs for some prohibited dainty" (282). In this case, however, the "prohibited dainty" takes the form of a cup that represents erotic pleasure.

It is not clear, however, who controls this cup, as Graham wishes to dispense the contents to Paulina, but delays in order to prolong his own pleasure: “At last the Doctor relented, took it down, and indulged himself in the gratification of letting her taste from his hands; his eyes, always expressive in the revelation of pleasurable feelings, luminously and smilingly avowed that it *was* a gratification; and he prolonged it by so regulating the position of the cup that only a drop at a time could reach the rosy, sipping lips by which its brim was courted” (282). Indeed, here Paulina takes on the role of suitor as her lips “court” the cup of ale. Moreover, vicariously through the cup, Graham finally receives the payment Paulina owes him for the dog picture. No longer the “burning lips” of her departure from Bretton, Paulina’s lips are “rosy” and “sipping,”—that is, they are somewhat subdued, or regulated. Paulina’s persistent girlhood, however, troubles this scene, for the cup exchange is eroticized, and the “gratification” of dispensing the ale hints that Graham receives sexual pleasure from the activity. Moreover, Graham’s holding of the cup for Paulina positions her as an infant who cannot nourish herself and requires nursing. Thus, this scene doubles Paulina’s later assertion to her father that she can never be weaned from him. In contrast to the “brimful” cup of pleasure that does not run over, this cup of sexual tension is one whose contents Paulina manipulates Graham into pouring into her mouth, as she asks for a “little more” and “petulantly touch[es] his hand with her forefinger, to make him incline the cup more generously and yieldingly” (282). Because Paulina is still the child and too young for a sexual relationship, or perhaps because she is now a woman and too mature to innocently engage in flirtation, their flirtatious exchange is not sanctioned, as Graham’s request suggests: “Don’t tell my mother or Lucy; they wouldn’t approve” (282). Paulina’s rejection of the ale underscores

her youth and implies a rejection of Graham's advances, as she cuts short the cup exchange because the "old October was only desirable while forbidden" (282). From this flirtation, Paulina returns to her father, doubling her actions ten years earlier at Bretton.

Her changeability, from interest to rejection, from flirtatious individual to part of her father, shows that Paulina has not outgrown her girlhood: as Lucy notes, "the child of seven was in the girl of seventeen" (282). Her mutability and liminality confuse Graham, who "look[s] after her a bit baffled, a little puzzled" (282). For Armitt, Paulina falsely performs as girl, and her "victory is assured in Graham's lack of certainty over just how to court her" (221). Yet at the same time, Paulina is no longer the girl with whom Graham feels at ease, for "the infantine sparkle [is] exhaled for the night," and Paulina becomes a lady who treats Graham with polite reserve, bidding him good night with a "very slight smile and quiet bow" (283). Graham cannot treat this woman as he treated the girl at Bretton, either snatching her aloft or carrying her upstairs to bed. Although Graham knew how to court the young girl, he has difficulty realizing Paulina can maintain her liminal position as both woman and child, and he "hardly kn[ows] how to blend together in his ideas the dancing fairy and the delicate dame" (283).

Girl or Woman, Daughter or Wife?

Whereas Graham sees both the woman and the child in Paulina, her father sees only the child, which threatens her ability to fulfill the duties of a mature woman. Indeed, Paulina's liminality positions her as a relative creature, whose status is in the eye of the beholder. Paulina, in and of herself, lacks a fixed identity as either woman or child. Indeed, her father seems to view her as "still but a child, and probably ha[s] not yet admitted the notion that others might look on her in a different light" (299). Far from

disabusing her father of such illusions, Paulina condones her father's talk of "what should be done when 'Polly' was a woman, when she should be grown up" (299). As Lucy points out, Paulina never corrects him, she "never s[ays], 'Papa, I *am* grown up'" (299). Moreover, she conceals from him the adult reasons for which she evinces child-like standoffishness. Keeping aloof because of her sexual attraction for Graham, Paulina is "shy" around him and sometimes "endeavour[s] to shun him" (299). Because Paulina is a girl in a woman, her father denies her maturity, and he tries to mold her manners as if she were still a girl, admonishing her, "[I]f you grow to be woman with these shy manners, you will hardly be fitted for society" (299). Moreover, Mr. Home encourages Paulina to be less inhibited around her former playmate and "talk away while he is here, and have no fear of him!" (300). Mr. Home's ignorance of the sexual threat a grown man poses to a nubile young woman underscores his denial of the potential for attraction between his daughter and Graham. As Paulina points out later, Mr. Home's instruction for his daughter to "talk away" contradicts the social expectation that Paulina should be silent: as Paulina tells Lucy, "If . . . if I liked Dr. John till I was fit to die for liking him, that alone could not license me to be otherwise than dumb" (373). Paulina's assertion that she is not "license[d]" to speak her feelings underscores the disconnect between her father's treatment of her as if she were a girl and her strict submission to the rules of Victorian patriarchal society.

At the Hotel Crecy, Paulina's liminal status continues to trouble her relationship with Graham. Paulina's sexually mature ability to attract becomes apparent as the Frenchmen make her the center of attention. Her "grace and mind char[m]" them, and they "cluste[r] about her" (313). Paulina's seeming womanhood confuses Graham, who

evinces uncertainty as to how to reconcile the girl and the woman. Graham pretends as if Paulina's womanhood has partially erased his memories of their childhood romance, asking Lucy, "On what terms were 'little Polly' and I? Unless my recollections deceive me, we were not foes—" (317). As Graham seeks Lucy's confirmation that his memory is reliable, his desire seems to be to map "little Polly's" affections for him onto Paulina. Lucy, haunted by Paulina's earlier statement that the "child of seven years lives yet in the girl of seventeen," implies that both Graham and Polly remember their past, and that this memory brings the past into the present: "You speak very vaguely. Do you think little Polly's memory not more definite?" (317). After seeing Paulina's sexual charms in action, Graham acts as if Paulina now is not the same person as Paulina from the Bretton days, protesting, "Oh! we don't talk of 'little Polly' *now*" (317). Undermining Paulina's maturity by mocking her as a "stately personage," Graham relies on memory to bring together in his mind the image of the young girl from the past and that of the beautiful lady from the present.

The Frenchmen's admiration of Paulina's feminine charms, which sparks confusion in Graham, also ensures his love for his cousin, for, as Lucy points out, Graham's love for Paulina is dependent on how she appears in public: "The pearl he admired was in itself of great price and truest purity, but he was not the man who, in appreciating the gem, could forget its setting" (369). Lucy's observation both reduces Paulina to an object, a pearl, and elevates her to a being with a fixed identity, an intrinsic value and purity that do not change. Moreover, Graham's inability to appreciate the gem itself suggests that for him, Paulina is a purely relative object, defined by her "setting." Furthermore, Graham does not determine Paulina's worth according even to her use

value, for Graham's love for Paulina is grounded in social approval, as "the world must admire what he d[oes], or he counted his measures false and futile" (369). Thus, Paulina becomes her sign-exchange value.

It is clearly not out of ignorance that Paulina does not take a stand and seek to fix her identity. For one, she does not set right her father's delusions about her age, as she stresses her knowledge of her father's misconceptions when she admits to Lucy, "I know so well papa's ideas about me: he forgets my age; he thinks I am a mere school-girl; he is not aware that other people see I am grown up as tall as I shall be . . ." (374). Paulina's liminality complicates her romantic life because she cannot let her father see Graham's letters without ruining her childishness in his eyes. Yet she is not so naive about the sexual tension Graham has felt toward her. Indeed, her knowledge of sexual attraction is preternatural, as a "voice seem[s] now to say that another feeling than filial affection was in question—to urge me to pray before I dared to read what I so longed to read—to deny myself yet a moment, and remember first a great duty. I have had these impulses ever since I can remember" (374). The scene underscores Paulina's uncanny preterhuman liminal status, as she acts not merely of her own volition but because of direction from outside her. Moreover, the indeterminate "voice" that dictates Paulina's actions is one that insists on self-effacement—rather than ensure her own gratification, Paulina must "deny" herself and put duty, here presumably her duty as a Christian or daughter, before her desires. As much as Paulina wishes to remain her father's child, she hints that her father's delusions may prevent her marriage: "He called Dr. Bretton a boy; I believe he almost thinks him so, just as he still thinks me a little girl" (371). The problem is, of course, that two children cannot wed.

Nevertheless, Paulina refuses to fix, either in the sense of to rectify or to establish, her identity as either woman or child, wife or daughter. Though she wishes to wed Graham, and knows she must be a woman to do so, she also desires the continuation of her relationship with her father, which necessitates her childlike dependence on him. Her liminality requires Paulina to act duplicitously and conceal her other identity. Paulina, thus, does not reveal the letter Graham sends her to her father. Her duplicity makes her “feel [her]self a thing double-existent—a child to that dear papa, but no more a child to [her]self” (374), but, as her self-definition as “thing” implies, she prefers not to be single-existent, eschewing categorizing herself as either woman or child. The “truth,” it seems, is that Paulina is sexually mature, as she evinces the desire that her father “be taught the truth, managed, and induced to hear reason” (375). Yet this “truth” of sexual maturity does not mean that Paulina is no longer “papa’s Polly,” but, rather, that she is both “papa’s Polly” and Graham’s Paulina. Instead, Paulina would maintain her liminal position between, and as both, girl and woman, daughter and wife. Armitt suggests that “Polly has merely been playing the child to lull Graham into the false belief that he can replace her own father in her affections. In setting the two men up in competition with each other she ensures that both will see only what she chooses to let them” (221). True: Paulina willfully plays up her childishness, but she is not merely “playing the child” because she is both child and adult. Moreover, the binary opposition underlying Armitt’s assertion, which would situate Paulina as either for her father or for Graham, proves false. Rather than set up the men in competition with each other, however, Paulina evinces a desire for both, not to have to choose. Thus, Paulina never seems to have suggested to Graham that he can replace her father but rather that she will love him in

addition to her father. She prays, for instance, “a strong entreaty that whatever happened, [she] might not be tempted or led to cause papa any sorrow, and might never, in caring for others, neglect him” (374). Because her identity is still bound up in her father’s, Paulina wishes to accrue people to whom she can minister as angel in the house, not exchange her father for another master. Yet, her uncanny lack of agency and subjectivity makes her vulnerable to just such an undesirable transfer, insofar as she might be coerced, or “tempted or led,” as she puts it, to act against her will and give up her father. The temptation against which Paulina prays hints that Graham’s sexual seduction of her threatens her liminal status as both daughter and wife. At the same time her uncanny liminality, which questions Paulina’s ability to be her own personage, enables Graham to pose a threat to her relationship with her father. Similarly, she dreads the thought of disabusing her father of his fantasy. Afraid to reveal the crushing reality, she cries, “Oh it will be pain to wake papa from his dream, and tell him I am no more a little girl!” (376).

Paulina’s uncanny status of the girl preserved in the woman, as well as her efforts to freeze the status quo, manifests in an uncannily double courtship with Graham. The lovers remain distant “so far as demonstrative courtship [goes],” but “in feeling they soon [draw] near” (423). Thus, Paulina’s contradictory nature is enacted in their relationship, which doubles the structure of flame within ice. In this case, the frost of physical aloofness helps protect and keep pure their emotional attachment. Because of this doubleness, the lovers may draw from the reserve of the past, which is not past, but preserved by the frost, just as little Polly is preserved in Paulina. Unable to enjoy physical intimacy now, the couple fixates on past erotic memories, as “while he was looking at her, recollections would seem to be suddenly quickened in his mind” (424). Thus,

Graham brings dead memories back to life. This revivification allows the sensual touches of the past, which are now forbidden, to continue to hold sway: “At this day he said he could recall the sensation of her little hands smoothing his cheek, or burying themselves in his thick mane” (424). Moreover, these reincarnated recollections simulate the tentative explorations of new lovers that they must now eschew. Indeed, these touches seem more well-suited to the grown-up couple than the childhood playmates: “He remembered the touch of her small forefinger, placed half tremblingly, half curiously, in the cleft of his chin, the lisp, the look with which she would name it ‘a pretty dimple,’ then seek his eyes and question why they pierced so” (424). Discussing their erotic past, the lovers can revive the pleasure they once experienced, prolonging it until they can melt the ice of physical reserve and access the fiery passion within. Indeed, Paulina underscores the hard exterior that stands between her and Graham’s inside, as she marvels at her physical forwardness as a girl: “Child as I was, . . . I wonder how I dared be so venturesome. To me he seems now all sacred, his locks are inaccessible, and, Lucy, I feel a sort of fear when I look at his firm, marble chin, at his straight Greek features” (425). The consummation of their marriage promises to be nothing new, but only a revivification of the physical intimacy the couple experienced at Bretton.

Paulina’s uncertain life status continues to haunt her relationship with Graham, who is “become dear as her life” (426). That is, Paulina is still not an individual first, but her identity derives equally from her self and her lover. Moreover, as Paulina predicts in her prayer that she will not “led” or “influenced” to hurt her father, Graham’s attractiveness is irresistible, for he “dr[aws] her like a powerful magnet” (426). Her liminal position between the two men threatens to set her life ablaze, as “[w]ith this

unconfessed confession, her letters glo[w]; it kindle[s] them” (426). Longing, yet afraid to tell her father, Paulina, as per usual, embodies both sides of the binary. Evincing her double self, Paulina tells Lucy, “There is nothing I long for more than to have this affair settled—to speak out candidly; and yet I dread the crisis” (426). Telling her father, of course, would threaten the state of suspended animation she has achieved in freezing her courtship with Graham. If her father knew of her love for Graham, she would have to give up the romance and, with it, her mature sexuality, or allow the courtship to proceed to marriage and, thus, forfeit her girlhood.

Although Paulina has not yet revealed her love for Graham, the glow from her confession catches her father’s attention, as “long blind on one point, an importunate light [is] beginning to trespass on his eye” (426). Indeed, when M. de Bassompierre discusses the prospect of Paulina’s marriage with Lucy, he uncovers the depth of his delusions. Although he has sufficient awareness of time to realize it’s been ten years since his daughter stayed at Bretton, he admits he “thought of her as twelve—fourteen—an indefinite date; but she seemed a child” (426). Because of her uncanny liminality and her precocious childhood, Paulina’s physical maturity is not apparent to him. Blind to his daughter’s beauty, Mr. Home does not realize men are already attracted to his “only pearl,” as he laments that “now others will find out she is pure and of price; they will covet her” (427). Mr. Home’s language here reveals his incestuous desire for and possessive ownership of his daughter. Whereas his comparison of Paulina to a “pearl” of “great prices” alludes to Matthew 13:46, as the editors of this edition point out in the notes, Mr. Home’s use of “covet” hints at the Biblical commandment that “thou shalt not

covet thy neighbor's wife." The implication is, thus, that Paulina rightfully belongs to him as his wife and that others desire her wrongfully.

What's more, Mr. Home blames Graham for Paulina's womanhood. He accuses Graham of indecently fondling his property: "He has touched the best thing I have" (427). Paulina's liminal position between child and woman, non-human and human, lends itself to the construction of her identity as not fixed but something to be determined by those around her. Indeed, it is Graham's touch that has initiated Paulina's puberty. As we see from Mr. Home's assertion that "[had Graham] but let her alone, she would have remained a child for years yet" (427), the father is convinced his daughter's sexual maturity is not a biological inevitability.

While Mr. Home's eyes have been opened to Graham's attraction to his daughter, he is still blind to his daughter's sexual attractiveness, as he attests, "My little girl is not thought a beauty" (428). Because he would believe that Graham's desire for his daughter was premature and initiates her sexual maturity, Mr. Home dismisses Paulina's "womanliness" in company as a girl's anomalous play at womanhood. Lucy reveals to him, however, that other men, like the "accomplished Frenchmen," appreciate Paulina's charms, and did not, as Mr. Home would believe, gather around her "as one might amuse one's self with a pretty infant" (429). Mr. Home's insistence that his daughter is an infant underscores their interdependency on each other, as does his recollection of his illness. When the father fell ill, Mr. Home tells Lucy, his daughter switched roles with him and "nursed" him. This role reversal situates Paulina as the mother and underscores how Paulina's animation is inseparable from her father's. In an extension of this reversal that echoes Paulina's earlier parasitic dependence on her father, she "grew at once stronger

and tenderer as [Mr. Home] grew worse in health” (429). In other words, the father and daughter seem to share one life force, so his weakness brings about her strength. The opposite is also true; as the father regains his strength, the daughter loses hers and relinquishes the role of caretaker to him. As Mr. Home recovers, Paulina “played about [his] chair as noiseless and as cheerful as light” (429). Though Paulina regresses from mother to child, she doubles and reverses the plant metaphor, her liveliness providing the “sunbeam” that allows her father to prosper (429).

Disturbingly, M. de Bassompierre’s possessive ownership of his daughter requires her to love him in a fashion that recalls the Lacanian Desire of the Mother. Unwilling to give up the idealized union with his child, Mr. Home tells Lucy, “I don’t want to part with her” (429). Lucy plays to his separation anxiety, suggesting that “it would be less like separation to give her to him than to another” (429). Mr. Home deems Lucy’s assertion that conflates father and lover “[t]rue” (429). Thus, it becomes apparent that Paulina’s uncanny liminal status, which earlier encouraged her father to possess her, now contributes to Mr. Home’s approval of her marriage to Graham. That is, because he blames Graham for desiring Paulina when she was a child, Mr. Home believes Paulina’s marriage to Graham will preserve to some extent her girlhood. Moreover, Graham’s premature love for Paulina mirrors Mr. Home’s love for his daughter, because both men prize both her womanliness and her girlishness. Nevertheless, the father laments the loss of undivided love: “My little treasure used to love her old father dearly and truly. It is all over now, doubtless—I am an incumbrance” (429). To her father, Paulina has committed an infidelity, for she no longer loves only him. That is, she is no longer defined only as “papa’s Polly,” as she was at Bretton. Yet Paulina’s uncanny liminality asserts itself, for

even as she wishes to wed Graham, she will not give up her father completely but remain under his control. Inviting her father to determine her life for her, she tells him, “Order something, papa; express your wish; only don’t hurt, don’t grieve Graham” (431). Caught up in an uncanny repetition compulsion, Paulina doubles the expression she used at Bretton to describe her misery at leaving Graham for her father: “I cannot, *cannot* bear that” (431). Paulina refuses to choose, stating her doubled love thus: “I love you, papa; but I love Graham, too, because—because—it is impossible to help it” (431). Moreover, it is not clear that Paulina can choose, for “it is impossible to help it.” Just as Paulina inhabits both sides of binary oppositions in her youth, so too will she reconcile the duties of daughter and wife.

Yet Paulina’s claim to a liminal position proves problematic for her father, who views his relationship with his daughter in binary terms, as either an intact union or a complete separation. M. de Bassompierre describes the separation as if he were the mother to his daughter, who, previously dependent on him for sustenance, is now “won and weaned from her old father” (431). Paulina, however, is not willing to forsake her childish dependence on her father in favor of a wifely dependence on her husband. Rather than confirm her maturity, Paulina reasserts her infantile unity with him, countering, “I am *not* weaned from you, and no human being and no mortal influence *can* wean me”(432). In addition to precluding the possibility of her ever physically separating from her father, this assertion that Paulina cannot be weaned promises she will never become sexually mature or marry.

Although Paulina pledges she will “never leave” her father, M. De Bassompierre recognizes that social convention necessitates the exchange of the bride from father to

groom (432). Mr. Home instructs his daughter, “Cease to be a daughter; go and be a wife!”(432). This interdict asserts that marriage will change Paulina's identity such that she will not be able retain and add to her previous identity. What's more, Paulina loses agency, as she becomes a mere object of exchange, as Mr. Home implies when he tells Dr. Bretton, “I am bereaved, and what I have lost, *you*, it seems, have won”(433). From her uncanny liminal status as child in woman, Paulina voices her resistance to the forced choice between daughter and wife: “I can take care of you both. I need not send Graham away—he can live here; he will be no inconvenience” (434). Thus, Paulina seeks to be the angel in the house for both men. Furthermore, her conviction that Graham will not be an “inconvenience” to her father implies that Paulina's wifely duties will not detract from her ability to serve as daughter.

Although Mr. Home tells Graham to “[t]ake her,” the ownership of Paulina is not so clear-cut. Indeed, instead of splitting her time between the two men, Paulina now accompanies both, as the group outing suggests. All three sit under a tree, with Paulina sitting silently “between the two gentlemen,” while they “convers[e]” (435). Father and future husband appear to share her, and, instead of being rivals, are now friends. Paulina’s uncanny liminality wins out, as she is literally situated between father and lover. Further demonstrating Paulina’s uncanniness is her dabbling in the occult to protect her from having to choose either childhood or sexual maturity. The bride-to-be braids an amulet of hair, “which has virtue to keep you two always friends” (435). Testifying to the strength of her supernatural powers, Paulina never clearly defines herself as either childish daughter or sexually mature wife, but, rather, she becomes a “bond to both, an influence over each, a mutual concord” (436). Paulina simultaneously

draws sustenance and animation from father and husband, as “[f]rom them she dr[aws] her happiness, and what she borrow[s], she, with interest, g[ives] back” (436). That Paulina siphons feelings from the men doubles her vampirism and parasitism at Bretton. At the same time, because her father and husband benefit from her, this marriage promotes a reciprocal exchange evocative of symbiosis, or of the reciprocal, self-sustaining interdependence of Desire of the Mother. In other words, the idealized union between father and daughter expands to include Graham, too, as the “father, the daughter, the future husband, now united—all blessed and blessing” embark on their happy life together (436).

Another Ambiguous Ending

Thus, because Paulina blurs the boundaries between daughter and wife, we should not dismiss her story as following the conventional marriage plot. While Armitt argues that the Brettons’ marriage “which comes before the climax of Lucy’s story—dismisses them from a world grown become too complex for them” (710), I would propose that we re-examine Paulina’s ending and give it credit for its complexity. Whereas Paulina’s commitment to the angel in the house before marriage made her an uncanny liminal figure who oscillates between child and adult, alive and not alive, her performance of the feminine ideal after marriage further problematizes her life status. Paulina’s selfhood, already uncannily divided and liminal, verges on disappearance after she weds. Paulina’s fate is ambiguous, described only in relation to her husband’s: “Bright, too was the destiny of his sweet wife. She kept her husband’s love, she aided in his progress—of his happiness she was the cornerstone” (436). As the omission of her name indicates, Paulina has lost her singular identity, now existing only in Dr. Bretton’s existence. While

bringing new life into the world may seem to confirm her status as a sexually mature, living female, her uncanny absence from the conception, bearing, and upbringing of her children further blurs the boundaries between girl and woman, and life and not-life. The birth and loss of a child, for instance, is strangely disassociated from Paulina, described only as “a cry in their halls, of Rachel weeping for her children” (437). And Paulina is again denied agency in the creation of other children, who seem to grow themselves like flowers as they “spr[ing] healthy and blooming to replace the loss” (437). Her offspring's floral nature links them to Paulina insofar as they extend the flower metaphor. At the same time the doubling of the comparison underscores Paulina's uncanny lack of agency, and the external sources which led to her happy union. In the same way the flower comparison earlier denied Paulina's ability to determine her own fate, so too does it here suggest that Paulina's ability to reproduce depends solely on favorable circumstances. Furthermore, the flower bearing floral offspring robs the process of sexual reproduction of all its animal lust. The sense that these children are not Paulina's is further heightened by their lack of similarity to her, as “Dr. Bretton s[ees] himself live again in a son who inherited his looks and his disposition; he ha[s] stately daughters, too, like himself” (437). Indeed, Paulina is also conspicuously absent from family life, apparently playing no role in the children's upbringing, as “these children he reared with a suave, yet firm hand; they grew up according to inheritance and nurture” (437). As Mrs. Bretton's haunting absence from family life confirms, far from fixing her identity as a living woman, Paulina's problematic maternity calls her life status and sexual maturity into question.

Thus far, I have demonstrated to what extent Paulina uncannily models Victorian femininity at the same time she resists binary oppositions. If Paulina is the norm against

which Lucy defines herself or to which other women should aspire, what's at stake in discovering that the paradigm of the angel in the house oscillates between child and adult, and human and not-human? Revealing the slippery uncertainty of Paulina's identity has the effect of destabilizing the ground of being and threatening to collapse Victorian heterosexual norms. Ultimately, then, Paulina's uncanny liminality casts doubt on the role the ideal Victorian woman can play in society, for Paulina's perfectly feminine status as a "relative creature" precludes her active participation in the social institutions of family and marriage. Moreover, through highlighting the liminality that results from the self-effacing adaptability the feminine ideal demands, Paulina's ever-shifting identity blurs boundaries to reveal that under the guise of flat femininity hides an irreducible multiplicity.

NOTES

1. In 1960, Robert Colby situates *Villette* at the point of convergence of Rousseau, de Saint-Pierre, “silver-fork” novels, sentimental magazines, Gothic novels, fictions supposedly founded on fact, and the tale of the nun. In 1966 E.D.H. Johnson’s study of the function of the nun in *Villette* initiates a full-blown discourse on the novel’s supernatural elements.

2. Sarah Stickney Ellis writes, “Women, considered in their distinct and abstract nature, as isolated beings, must lose more than half their worth. They are, in fact, from their own constitution, and from the station they [sic] occupy in the world, strictly speaking, relative creatures” (Women 123).

3. Freud notes this slipperiness in his semantic analysis, which concludes that “*heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*” (134).

4. Freud proposes that “we should distinguish between the uncanny one knows from experience and the uncanny one only fancies or reads about” (154).

5. Freud lists some manifestations of the double: “Moreover, a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other’s self for his own. The self may be thus duplicated, divided and interchanged. Finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial feature, the same characters, the same misdeeds, even the same names, through successive generations” (142).

6. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar also point to the feminist potential of Lucy's narration, exploring how her narrative evasiveness and unreliability subvert male narrative conventions as she seeks to "create an adequate fiction of her own" (419). Janice Carlisle asserts that the narrative functions as a mirror that reflects a distorted satisfying view of reality. Thus, by making Paulina her alter-ego, Lucy can play Graham and enjoy the outspoken romantic pursuit her sex forbade her from initiating with Graham. Karen Lawrence asserts Lucy's agency in choosing invisibility, which protects her from being "misread" (89). Along the same lines, Joseph A. Boone argues that Lucy's invisibility allows her to "negotiate an erotic and . . . eventually autoerotic quest that depends ultimately on Lucy's control of the gaze" (22). Thus, Boone claims, Lucy's narrative proves that woman's desire can drive narrative structure.

7. Brontë 34.

8. Armitte conducts a similar reading when she asks, "Is the child herself a spirit (as the fairy connection suggests), or are both she and Lucy being haunted by the spirits of their dead mother?" (219).

9. Indeed, Jane Marie Todd notes that the uncanny, as defined by Schelling, functions as both a veiling and unveiling. On one hand, everything the uncanny is what was "meant to remain secret and hidden" but has been revealed. On the other hand, as Todd points out, Freud tells us that the divine is veiled with *Unheimlichkeit*.

10. As Armitte points out, Polly is compared to a doll repeatedly "yet not in a manner that allows Polly to return to a 'safe' infantile image" (219). Moreover, as

Hennelly proposes, Paulina bears remarkable resemblance to the mechanical doll Olimpia, whom Freud finds so uncanny.

11. These instances can be found on pages 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 32, 35, 36, 38, 40, 42, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 54, 55, 58, and 59 in the Stewart and Murray *Villette*.

12. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that this form is rare, this alternate meaning haunts the passage.

13. Freud 124.

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