THE OTHER CROSS-CHANNEL NEIGHBOR: IMAGINING AND APPROPRIATING BELGIUM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the effects of increasingly negative perceptions on the representation of Belgium in Victorian literature, but also those of more positive associations, particularly in the literature that more closely followed Belgium's independence. The study focuses on works by Charlotte Brontë, William Thackeray, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Florence Marryat and reveals that, while these authors have sometimes been described as a-political by some critics or biographers, they all show a surprisingly acute knowledge of Belgian affairs. This study seeks to throw new light on each author's ability to explore questions related to British, Belgian and European identities, the contemporaneous situation of Belgium and the state of Belgo-British perceptions, as well as to their position as travelers, outsiders and writers of their own experiences on the Continent. It investigates how these literary productions showcase not only these authors' knowledge of Belgium and of Victorian views of Belgium, but also their integration of the context of changing British perceptions towards Belgium in the service of unique, individual artistic pursuits that often have a lot more to do with the British cultural realm at the time than with international politics.

The first chapter focuses on two little-known productions by William Makepeace Thackeray, *Papers by the Fat Contributor* and *Little Travels and Roadside Sketches* (1844-1845) and shows how these travel accounts showcase not only Thackeray's burgeoning talent for satire but also his ability to explore questions of literary genre in ways that belie the apparent disorganization of these texts. At a time when British interest in Belgium had not yet waned, Thackeray uses Belgium to question how an increased British access to Continental tourism might change Romantic ideas about travel and extends the focus of his narrative to the

Victorians' conceptions of travel writing and the latter's role, alongside history writing, in shaping ideologies around class and nationalism.

The second chapter tackles Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* (1846-1857) and *Villette* (1853). While pre-1960s criticism of both novels focuses on these characters' individual experiences, later critics have positioned their conflicts in the context of Britishness in a Continental setting. This chapter extends the latter approach to include an investigation of the effects of Belgian history on the multicultural, interpersonal conflicts described in each narrative and analyzes descriptions of national and religious identity crises as they affect characters from both sides of the Channel. Reading *Villette* from the standpoint of Belgium's struggle for independence, and the role played by religion and education in the latter, it analyzes how this historical background inflects Brontë's narrative. Then, while investigating the changes in Victorian perception of Belgium in the time gap separating the two novels, it offers possible explanations for Brontë's choice in *Villette* to shift from *The Professor*'s setting (Brussels in 1846) to the fictional Labassecour, as it considers the advantages and limitations that a recognizably Belgian setting poses to her.

The third chapter focuses on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's trip taken with William Holman Hunt to France and Belgium and the resulting *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* (1849), in particular the lesser-known travel poems that document the poet's experience in the Belgian cities and landmarks he visits, his modes of transportation, and his occasional musings on Belgium and the Belgians. It shows that, even if a close reading reveals the poet's awareness of the post-1848 political climate on each side of the Belgo-French border, his chief preoccupation is with Medieval "Belgian" art and its potential enrichment of Pre-Raphaelitism. The chapter highlights the variety of themes these poems ultimately investigate: from train travel and its resulting

sensory explorations, to reflections on mass tourism and its effects on artistic institutions and, last but not least, a poetic quest to connect intellectually with the Flemish masters of the past while acknowledging Belgian modernity. The sonnet sequence echoes a different use of Belgium (aiming at changing opinions at home) as well as a waning interest of Victorians in Belgium starting in the late 1840s.

Finally, chapter four focuses on Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897). It shows how both the rise of middle-class British tourism to Belgium and the growth of Belgium as a colonial power in Central Africa restored Belgium to Victorian public attention in the 1880s and 1890s, and how this double historical backdrop informs Marryat's use of the country in her story. The study reveals how, while Brontë, Rossetti and Thackeray used Belgium to investigate questions related to Britishness within a mostly cross-Channel and North-European framework, Marryat's novel places Heyst and London as nodes on an even more international network, echoing the increasing inter-connectedness of European and world economies. Finally, it connects these observations with a discussion and questioning of the novel's genre, showing how Marryat's use of Belgium serves to undermine the core of her novel's supernatural promises. This, the chapter argues, echoes the propensity of her British characters to embrace fantastical logic at the expense of truth about colonial exploitation, poor factory working conditions and racism.

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To my wife Colleen and the four loves of our lives,

Raphael, Noah, William and Elyse,

and to my mom and dad

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike French children who are taught to look back at centuries of palpably "French" history from an early age (from stories of Gallic tribes to Charlemagne, Louis XIV, or Napoleon Bonaparte), Belgian students are commonly only introduced to Belgian history as high school seniors. The reason is simple: to a nation less than two centuries old, "Belgian" history is one of various European occupying powers. Independent Belgium came into being in 1830 and, like many countries that emerged from a past of successive occupiers, it is a multifarious, complex nation. A federalized kingdom divided in three language communities, three regions and ten provinces, Belgium is culturally and ethnically diverse, politically split. These divisions have not deterred its inhabitants from clinging to seemingly random "national" cultural icons,[1] or elements predating the nation's birth,[2] as symbols of a supposedly unified "Belgian cultural identity." While rich and unique, this "kaleidoscopic" view of Belgian identity, equating national identity with its disjointed cultural parts, falls short when one tries to describe Belgium to non-Belgians. The rise of political parties advocating Belgium's split indicates that, as members of a nation whose creation and royal legitimacy relied primarily on the approval and interests of other European powers in the early nineteenth century, Belgians have never quite shaken off the fear that no particularly strong cement keeps those various cultural, linguistic and geographical parts together. The history of Belgium and that of Victorian Britain are closely intertwined. Early on, Britain was a major influence in securing Belgium's status as an independent and neutral state, as shown during the 1830 London Conference (which established Belgian independence) and

1 These may be singers like Jacques Brel, Stromae or Angèle, visual artists like Magritte, Delvaux, Horta or Hergé, local culinary specialties, popular sport personalities, distinct contemporary landmarks.
2 These would include, for example, the old Flemish masters, jewels of medieval and Baroque architecture, forms of intangible heritage (like the Carnival of Binche, the Ducasse de Mons or the Ommegang), specific events like the Battle of Waterloo or vaguer references to Belgium's Gallic roots.

vigorous reaction to German invasion in 1914. When Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, Belgium was one of the youngest political entities in Europe. Prior to 1830, “Belgium” and “Belgians” were familiar terms. From the time of Roman settlements, the term “Belgium” referred to a geographical area. For centuries, rule over that central location in Northern Europe was coveted by larger powers. So the sixteenth and seventeenth century was marked by Spanish and Austrian-Habsburgian rule, while the late eighteenth century saw its annexation to the French First Republic. Following the dissolution of the latter and the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the fate of the “Southern Netherlands” (approximately modern day Belgium) was a matter of intense debates. Seeing in the power vacuum created by the French defeat an opportunity to reunite Northern and Southern parts of the Low Countries, William Frederick of Orange-Nassau declared Belgium the “Southern Province” of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, a decision which was then internationally validated by the Congress of Vienna. Britain was a primary backer of this reconfiguration, and hoped that William's Kingdom would act as a buffer between larger European powers. For the next fifteen years, most British political commentators viewed the new configuration positively. The United Kingdom of the Netherlands proved a reliable economic partner to the British and, as sovereign of a predominantly Protestant country, William was viewed as a ruler able to keep his Catholic minority in check.

However, growing unrest in the Kingdom's “Southern Province” in the late 1820s—relating to issues around education, language and religion—quickly put it back on the British radar as a culturally and politically separate entity. When the Belgian War of Independence broke out in the summer of 1830, British feelings were mixed. Coming at the tail of the French July Revolution, the event forced Britain to establish its diplomatic stance towards this new nation. But as trade relations between Britain and the United Kingdom of the Netherlands had

started to deteriorate in the preceding years, admiration for the Dutch monarch also waned and, with it, trust in his political decisions. The upcoming Whig majority believed that the creation of an independent Belgium could be beneficial to the region, as well as to British geopolitical and commercial interests. In late 1830, the British government, in which Palmerston played a key role as Foreign Secretary, while initially sharing Tory concerns about the influence of Roman Catholics and the French in having fomented the Revolution, eventually supported independence. In contrast to the anti-Catholicism that governed British attitudes toward the Irish Question, positive interpretations of the Belgian Revolution and its aftermath became common. This positive image persisted until the late 1840s, particularly as the Belgians, despite economic struggles, refused to partake in the unrest that was shaking other European nations in 1848. However, from the mid-1850s onward, Belgium's image in Britain started deteriorating as a result of a growing belief in Belgians' lack of political awareness, the Catholic clergy's increasing role in shaping Belgian policies, the government's willingness to work closely with Napoleon III, its reliance on Britain for its military defense and, finally, Belgium's growth as a competing colonial power.

From the early 1830s on, independent Belgium confronted early Victorian Britain with challenging questions: How much could this young, Roman Catholic nation be trusted as a political ally and potential British "foothold" on the Continent? Would its political and economic success provide support for the proponents of Irish independence? Would this industrializing nation be willing to become a close economic partner and replica of Britain on the Continent? With time, what forms of political allegiances could it form with France, The Netherlands, or Prussia? All these uncertainties suddenly clashed with the relatively monotone perceptions of the region prior to 1830. Early nineteenth-century literary works set in Belgium, including

Thomas Grattan's popular *The Heiress of Bruges: A Tale of the Year Sixteen Hundred* (1830), adopted the romanticized lens of distant history. Other works viewed Belgium as a mere background for historical events,[3] or, like Eliza Parker's *La Coquetterie, or, Sketches of society in France and Belgium* (1832), did not reflect on the burning new questions of a recently emancipated nation.

This dissertation seeks to investigate the effects of increasingly negative perceptions on the representation of Belgium in Victorian literature, but also those of more positive associations, particularly in the literature that more closely followed Belgium's independence. In my study, I build on the rich criticism of some canonical works (Charlotte Brontë), but also seek to throw light on neglected works from established authors (William Thackeray, Dante Gabriel Rossetti), and advance our understanding of a minor, recently rediscovered author (Florence Marryat). The material I discuss includes a variety of genres (novels, poems and travel narratives) and considers a variety of moments within the Victorian period, as I look into the post-independence, but pre-1848 Belgian scene (via Thackeray and Brontë), post-1848 experience of France and Belgium (via Rossetti), as well as a more global view of Belgium and Britain within a late-century colonial framework (via Marryat). My study reveals that, while these authors have sometimes been described as a-political by some of their critics or biographers (particularly in the case of Brontë or Rossetti), they all show a surprisingly acute knowledge of European—and, more precisely, Belgian—affairs. I seek to throw new light on each author's distinct ability to explore questions related to British, Belgian and European identities, the contemporaneous situation of Belgium and the state of Belgo-British perceptions, as well as to their position as travelers, outsiders and writers of their own experiences in Belgium and on the Continent as a

3 Consider for example the case of works on the Battle of Waterloo, such as Robert Southey's *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816) but also, much later, Arthur Conan Doyle's *Brigadier Gerard* (1894-1903).

whole. More importantly, my dissertation also investigates how these literary productions showcase not only these authors' knowledge of Belgium and of Victorian views of Belgium at the time, as well as their engagement in some of the questions mentioned above, but also their subtle integration of the context of changing British perceptions towards Belgium in the service of unique, individual artistic pursuits that often have a lot more to do with the British cultural realm at the time than with international politics. These pursuits range from exploring Belgium's "dullness" as a challenge to the travel writer (Thackeray), imagining new spaces in and out of Belgium's specific history as setting for multicultural love and understanding (Brontë), acknowledging both Belgian medieval past and post-Revolutionary present in an attempt to revive British art (Rossetti), to combining a meta-textual exploration of the theme of hypocrisy and deception with a critique of colonial and industrial practices in both Belgium and Britain (Marryat).

Because my dissertation focuses on contextualizing and describing the creative (literary) use of Victorian views of Belgium, Pieter François' *'A Little Britain on the Continent.' British Perceptions of Belgium, 1830-1870* (2010) has proved a valuable work of historical reference. Despite growing interest in analyzing the eighteenth and nineteenth-century relationships and exchanges between Britain and France, or Britain and Europe,[4] works specifically looking at Belgo-British relations are rare. The temptation, as in Anne Longmuir's work on Brontë, has been to assume that Victorian Britain considered Belgium either as a neutral, unmarked "blank space"[5] or, perhaps, the synthesis of other European cultures (such as the British and the French, or the French and the Dutch). François, analyzing parliamentary and diplomatic artifacts, newspapers, travel accounts, guides, and a few works of literature, traces three stages in a

4 For example, Robert and Isabelle Tombs' *That Sweet Enemy. Britain and France: The History of a Love-Hate Relationship* (2008) and Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever's influential *The Literary Channel* (2002).
5 See Terry Eagleton (67).

complex arc of perceptions of Belgium over 40 years. The first entails concern and distrust preceding and shortly following Belgium's independence in 1830. The second, in the years that followed, is characterized by a mixture of fear and hope fueled by Belgium's economic performance and the influence of the Belgian clergy on the country's politics. Finally, the third is rooted in gradual British indifference, starting in the 1850s and following the interpretation of Belgium's stability in the midst of Europe's 1848 revolutions as a sign of lack of political awareness. Marysa Demoor's *The Field of Flanders. Alles, of bijna alles wat Engelse auteurs ooit schreven over Vlaanderen en Belgie... en waarom* (2002),[6] which remained until now the only study of British literature on the subject of Belgium, has been another useful source of information for this dissertation. However, whereas Demoor offers a widescale overview of British literature on Belgium (starting as far back as the Roman Period) and generally seems to focus on negative views of Belgium, I aim for greater critical depth in choosing a narrower Victorian focus and, referring to François' work, avoid adopting a standardizing understanding of Victorian views of Belgium throughout the nineteenth century.

Looking at Thackeray's *Little Travels and Roadside Sketches* and *Papers by the Fat Contributor* (published respectively in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* and *Punch* between 1844 and 1845), Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and *The Professor* (written in 1846, but published posthumously in 1857), Rossetti's *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* (written in 1849 but published posthumously three decades later by his brother) and finally, Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), I thus investigate each author's individual experiences with Belgium,[7] as well as the particular British perceptions of Belgium that each would have been exposed to.

6 "The Field of Flanders. Everything, or almost everything English authors ever wrote about Flanders and Belgium... and why" (translation mine). The work, written in Dutch, has unfortunately no translation.
7 This is particularly the case of Thackeray, Brontë and Rossetti, who all had extended and well-documented experiences in Belgium.

Thus, my methodology involves at first turning to and researching the history of Victorian cultural perceptions of Belgium and seeing to what extent these literary works reproduce these cross-Channel stereotypes and imagery. When, as in my chapter on Marryat, I deal with a period of time not covered by François' research, I adopt his methodology to create of picture of extra-literary British perceptions of Belgium at the time. Combining this historical research with close reading then helps me shed light on how the selected authors do not simply reflect or reproduce the changing arc of perceptions; instead they consciously refer to British perceptions of Belgium, as well as their effects, as they explore Britishness and literature in general. Whereas François describes the few literary figures he turns to as individuals who either fully embrace or, conversely, are eager to "[break] with the standard conventions and dominant expectations" (15), my more formal and less biographical approach centers on works that call these perceptions into question and turn them into inspirations for nuanced, multidimensional aesthetic engagement.

Besides investigating what these authors have to tell us about Belgium, analysing *how* they are telling it to us is of course equally important, particularly when, as I show, some of these authors' discussions of Belgium go hand in hand with forms of experimentation with certain genre conventions. As the diversity of my material shows, Belgium provides an object for writing of various kinds (poems, travel literature, fiction). One might describe *The Professor* and, in particular *Villette,* as only "quasi-realist" novels (to quote Blair E. Wilson [20]) given their narratorial set-up and references to the gothic (particularly in *Villette*).[8] Biographically, the two novels, both written in the first person, constitute a fractured mirror of Brontë's personal experience of Belgium. The earlier *The Professor* shows signs of Brontë's difficult personal relation with Belgium as a whole. The later and more "mature" *Villette* exhibits elements of

8 For more on Brontë and realist conventions, see Wilson.

Gothic romance and idealized visions of transnational connections which the "Belgian" context (reconfigured as "Villette") helps shape. In *Papers by the Fat Contributor* and *Little Travels and Roadside Sketches*, Thackeray's journalistic narrative both mimics and firmly questions the form of the travel account and voice of the touristic guide. Thackeray's style, in which comic, satirical effects abound, combines with a choice of topic ("boring" 1840s Belgium) and genre (the simultaneously "informative" and "personal" travel account) that are bound to clash. Rossetti, through his sequence of poems *A Trip to Paris and Belgium,* a mix of sonnets and blank verses, questions, like Thackeray, the value of Belgium as subject matter, but also transcends his doubtful stance. Belgium not only offers him a poetic "challenge" he takes on while embracing his interest in the Belgian medieval past, but the means by which the poet explores the Continent become opportunities to experiment with new impressionistic poetic effects and reflections. Finally, Marryat's novel *The Blood of the Vampire*, exemplifies popular late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, but reveals strains of social and geopolitical critique which, upon closer inspection, involve the Belgian locale playing an active role.

Each of these authors experiences Belgium in different ways and shares visions of characters and narrators encountering the Belgian "Other" in different traveling circumstances. Without resorting to reductive biographical interpretation, we might recognize the personal perspective offered by Brontë in her description of Lucy Snowe and William Crimsworth, who, like the author herself, experience Belgium on largely personal and inter-personal levels. Their experience in Belgium, rooted in professional growth, spreads over the span of several months and each novel takes place almost exclusively in one single "Belgian" location (Brussels/Villette). In both Thackeray and Rossetti, on the other hand, Belgium is primarily a touristic/artistic destination, a network of towns which authors and narrators visit only for a few

weeks. In Rossetti, a visit to Belgium follows a period in France, making comparisons unavoidable. Visiting the old medieval towns is the poet's main goal and his Belgian experience serves his future artistic endeavors in Britain. In Thackeray, the visit to Belgium is a first step towards traveling beyond Europe. While the attractive "Orient" pulls the narrators of these travel writings away from "boring" Belgium, the textual juxtaposition of European and non-European narratives reveals clichés at the core of all travel writing. Thackeray shows that, whether in Belgian Gothic convents or at the feet of Egypt's pyramids, mass tourism will unfailingly undermine the traveler's expectations. The two halves of Marryat's novel, meanwhile, describe British characters first as tourists during a prolonged stay in the Belgian coastal town of Heyst and then at home in London. These two urban spaces, Marryat shows us, are part of a larger global network.

The Brussels/Waterloo chapters of *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848) have provided a common entry point for literary scholars writing about Thackeray and Belgium. In my first chapter, I instead focus on two earlier, little-known productions.[9] Thackeray traveled to Belgium in 1840 and 1843 with the intent of turning his travel notes into a publishable work akin to his *Paris Sketchbook* (1831-1840). The two resulting works have been largely dismissed as minor precursors to major works like *Vanity Fair* or *Pendennis*. I show how these travel accounts showcase not only Thackeray's burgeoning talent for satire—in particular when directed against his fellow compatriots—but also his ability to explore questions of literary genre in ways that belie the apparent disorganization of these texts. At a time when British interest in Belgium had not yet waned, Thackeray uses Belgium to question how an increased British access to Continental tourism might change Romantic ideas about travel (a question which he then

9 I focus first on these pieces of pseudo-journalistic work as they are based on two trips that took place before and after that of Brontë to Brussels in 1842 (the subject of my second chapter).

explores even further in *From Cornhill to Cairo* [1846]), and then extends the focus of his narrative to the Victorians' conceptions of travel writing and the latter's role, alongside history writing, in shaping ideologies around class and nationalism.

My second chapter tackles Brontë's *The Professor* (1846-1857) and *Villette* (1853), two works that most literary scholars would likely describe as the most "Belgian" of all Victorian novels. Brontë's difficult personal experience of Belgium as both student and employee at Constantin Heger's Pensionnat from 1842 to 1844 provides a rich context for analyzing the dilemmas faced by her two main protagonists and their difficulties in embracing (and being embraced) by the local Continental culture. While pre-1960s criticism of both novels focuses on these characters' individual experiences, later critics have positioned their conflicts in the context of Britishness in a Continental setting.[10] I extend the latter approach to include an investigation of the effects of Belgian history on the multicultural, interpersonal conflicts at the core of each narrative. Indeed, I show that biographical and British-centered readings of these works miss the chance to analyze their descriptions of national and religious identity crises as they affect characters from both sides of the Channel. Reading *Villette* from the standpoint of Belgium's struggle for independence, and the role played by religion and education in the latter, I analyze how this historical background inflects Brontë's narrative, in particular Lucy's relation to her Belgian love interest. Then, while investigating the changes in Victorian perception of Belgium in the time gap separating the writing of the two novels, I offer possible explanations for Brontë's choice in *Villette* to shift from *The Professor*'s setting (Brussels in 1846) to the fictional Labassecour; I consider the advantages and limitations that a recognizably Belgian setting poses to her as she explores the forms which multicultural understanding, love and respect might take.

10 Consider Anne Longmuir, Richard Bonfiglio, or Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky.

My third chapter focuses on Rossetti's trip taken with William Holman Hunt to France and Belgium to visit the art museums of Paris, Bruges and Antwerp and the resulting *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* (1849). The ekphrastic poems, describing the Flemish paintings Rossetti admired, are devoid of contemporaneous geographical and temporal markers and have been the subject of extensive research. In this chapter, I focus instead on the lesser-known travel poems that document the poet's experience in the Belgian cities and landmarks he visits, his modes of transportation, and his occasional musings on Belgium and the Belgians. While differing in their generic choices, both Thackeray and Rossetti pretend to just nonchalantly record their touristic impressions. Rossetti seems at first to embrace a vision of Belgium as an uninspiring locale even more openly than Thackeray did six years earlier. Even if a close reading reveals the poet's awareness of the post-1848 political climate on each side of the Belgo-French border, his chief preoccupation is with Medieval "Belgian" art and its potential enrichment of Pre-Raphaelitism, a movement then in its infancy. But Rossetti's Belgian poems are also striking for the variety of themes they ultimately investigate: from train travel and its resulting sensory explorations, to reflections on mass tourism and its effects on artistic institutions and, last but not least, a poetic quest to connect intellectually with the Flemish masters of the past while acknowledging Belgian modernity. His sonnet sequence echoes a different use of Belgium (aiming at changing opinions at home) as well as a waning interest of Victorians in Belgium starting in the late 1840s.

My last chapter, on *The Blood of the Vampire*," focuses on Marryat's little-known work of fiction. The story is that of a young quadroon heiress from Jamaica vacationing in Belgium, mingling with British tourists, falling in love with British men on both sides of the Channel, and eventually meeting her death as a would-be vampiric figure. The time gap separating the previously tackled works from this novel is characterized by a gradual change in Victorians'

perception of Belgium, which, while a Continental partner appreciated for its economic and political stability, had become, in the collective Victorian imagination, a location fully stripped of exoticism or originality, inventiveness or personality. Therefore Marryat's choice of "dull Belgium" as locale for a Gothic narrative about an enigmatic, mixed-race anti-hero appears surprising. In this chapter, I show how both the rise of middle-class British tourism to Belgium and the growth of Belgium as a colonial power in Central Africa restored Belgium to Victorian public attention in the 1880s and 1890s, and how this double historical backdrop informs Marryat's use of the country for her story. My analysis reveals how, while the works of Brontë, Rossetti and Thackeray used Belgium to investigate questions related to Britishness within a mostly cross-Channel and North-European framework, Marryat's novel places Heyst and London as nodes on an even more international network, echoing the increasing inter-connectedness of European and world economies. Finally, I connect these observations with a discussion and questioning of the novel's genre, showing how Marryat's use of Belgium serves to undermine the core of her novel's supernatural promises. This, I show, echoes the propensity of her British characters to embrace fantastical logic at the expense of truth about colonial exploitation, poor factory working conditions and racism.

Although criticism on the representation of Continental nations like France or Italy in Victorian literature abound, Belgium has been a neglected subject. My dissertation shows that, while they might at times foster negative views on the country, authors like Brontë, Thackeray, Rossetti and Marryat showed a surprising knowledge of Belgium's history, as well as of the country's overall perception in the British Isles. A study of Belgium in nineteenth-century British literature adds complexity and dimension to North-European cross-channel studies, regularly focused on a French-British axis, by showing that Belgium offered its own, different forms of

complexity and challenges—whether cultural, religious or political in nature—as a new partner to Britain on the Continent, and by resisting being simply assimilated to France in the Victorian imagination. This study enriches the field of transnational literary studies by considering the effects that the creation of a new Catholic nation at the heart of Europe might have had on Victorian authors, and it throws light on how, across a variety of literary genres, those who wrote about Belgium creatively referred to British perceptions of the young nation to accomplish artistic and ideological goals very much connected to the British cultural issues of their days.

CHAPTER 1

FROM OSTEND TO THE FIELDS OF WATERLOO: WILLIAM THACKERAY AND THE CHALLENGE OF TRAVEL WRITING IN *LITTLE TRAVELS AND ROADSIDE SKETCHES* AND *PAPERS BY THE FAT CONTRIBUTOR* (1844-1845)

Wedged between Paris, Ireland and Cairo: Thackeray's early trips to Belgium

The history of William Makepeace Thackeray's relation to Belgium combines financial, touristic and literary interests, as well as incidents rooted in his family life. Before the success of *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848), Thackeray, as a young journalist, was always on the move between the French and British capitals in the late 1830s and early 1840s, and took multiple trips to the Low Country. This period of his life, characterized by "endless Channel crossings" (Monsarrat 128), "affected his character and work more profoundly than . . . any other part of his life" (Ray, *The Uses of Adversity*, 273), fostered his appreciation of Continental culture and affected his journalistic writing style.[11] Following the success of *The Paris Sketch Book* (1840), Thackeray planned a travel narrative on Belgium, Holland and the Rhine region, which he prepared for by taking two longer, data-gathering trips (in 1840 and 1843). Burdened by gambling debts and his wife's medical expenses, Thackeray was undergoing financial duress and saw the promise of a successful work on Belgium as a chance to finally break through the literary scene.[12] The pressure to gather enough interesting material for his project is perceptible in his letters to his

11 See Elisabeth Jay's chapter on Thackeray's in *British Writers and Paris. 1830-1875*.
12 Thackeray's wife describes him "sure that Titmarsh in Belgium will take as Titmarsh in Paris" (Ray, *Letters*, vol 2, 462)

mother, where he complained that his travel companion, Augustus Stevens,[13] had been preventing him from "turn[ing] the [Belgian] sights into any profit afterwards" (Ray, *Letters*, vol 2, 116) and that "hav[ing] not gained twopence worth of ideas in the course of the journey," he was "looking at everything without the leisure to reflect on it: or indeed the time to see it" (120). This sense of pressure, and his growing uncertainty about his choice of subject color the two short narratives he produced, *Little Travels and Roadside Sketches*[14] and *Papers by the Fat Contributor*[15] (1844-1845).

While Belgium, as a nation hardly a decade old, had the potential to pique the interest of British readers, Thackeray was also aware of its potential as an un-exotic, too familiar neighbor, a place looking more and more like a "Little Britain" on the Continent.[16] Because of Thackeray's own uncertainties, *Little Travels* and *Papers* were both overshadowed by the longer and more controversial *Irish Sketch Book* (1842) and *Notes from a Journey, from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1846). Critical attention to Thackeray's use of Belgium has hitherto been confined to the Belgian chapters of *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848) and analyses of *Little Travels* and the Belgian sections of *Papers* have been almost non-existent.[17] Certainly, Thackeray's choice and descriptions of sights will not strike readers as particularly original. However, I would like to argue that, in spite of the financially-driven "patched-up" nature of their structures, these two early Belgian narratives, under the guise of a somewhat rushed overview of Belgium's touristic

13 On the continent to buy art, Stevens, who was financing Thackeray's trip, had a significant say in its itinerary. See Ray, *Letters*, vol 2, 120.
14 Published in *Fraser* between 1844 and 1845, now referred to as *Little Travels*.
15 Published sequentially in *Punch* in the same period, and followed by narratives of his trip to Cairo, now referred to as *Papers*.
16 His initial plan, "a love story interwoven with a tour" (Ritchie xxii), would have resulted in a work of fiction likely to reach a wider audience, but, requiring more time to execute, had been abandoned in the rush to turn the Belgian notes into quickly publishable, profitable material.
17 Consider, for example, Monsarrat's *An Uneasy Victorian*, Peters' *Thackeray's Universe*, or Forster's fictional auto-bio graphy, *Memoirs of a Victorian Gentleman*. Even Gordon Ray's biography relegated Thackeray's *Little Travels* to a footnote in which its critical value was merely seen as an example of Thackeray's propensity to maximize financial profit.

landmarks, enable Thackeray to develop, through both form and contents, a critique of mid-nineteenth-century touristic "culture" (in the broadest sense of the term). This critique operates on a multiplicity of levels (social, commercial, literary) and explores questions relating to British views on social class, cosmopolitanism and nationalism. As I will show in this chapter, Thackeray, through his playful use of narrators, skillfully questions the then evolving genre of the travel guide (which he pretends to emulate), and, in the process, the viability of personal travel narratives and the sense of cosmopolitan "wonder" in a touristic global market marked by heightened commodification. As he undermines some of the cultural, historical and literary clichés attached to Belgium, Thackeray throws light on how such commodification affects how his narrators experience their material and present it to their audience. As he questions the very nature of the travelogue genre, Thackeray then uses his narrators' Belgian narratives—in particular their views on social and political engagement in Belgium and on the differences between British and Belgian nobility—to turn his readers' attention towards British social, political and literary issues.

Thackeray's narrators and the rise of the "modern guidebook"

The varied, contradictory responses to Thackeray's travel narratives over the past century and a half (particularly regarding their narrators' ideological standpoint) are rooted in critical oversight of his use of narrative voices in his journalistic work. Placing these travel narratives in the context of Victorian reader-responses to journalism, Elizabeth Segel notes,

> The proper and just rebuttal in Thackeray's defense, which has thus far been overlooked, must be founded on the observation that Thackeray's contemporaries were much keener at spotting the persona-author distinction than present readers

> because, being acquainted with Thackeray's journalism as the twentieth-century reader is not, they were accustomed to finding in his writing narrators who clearly were not Thackeray. (57)

The author-narrator distinction, in the case of journalistic work, was more difficult for early critics to establish because of the nature of this peculiar literary genre, and Thackeray's own propensity to pretend collapsing the distinction between himself and his persona contributed to blurring the lines. Further analyzing his use of fictional narrative persona like Titmarsh, Segel explains that

> To take fullest advantage of the reader-author intimacy offered by serial publication, Thackeray saw, required the presence in the novel of not just an authorial voice but an onlooker-narrator who was a character in the novel, a spokesman standing on the outskirts of the action, able to turn from it to the reader—to relate, to interpret, to correct inappropriate responses, to amuse and to instruct. Thackeray perceived that he could thus personalize the relationship, making it an interaction between author and the individual reader rather than the more common and less useful, essentially commercial relationship between an author and "his public." (65)

In *Little Travels* and *Papers*, Thackeray's process, consisting in "personaliz[ing] the relationship" between his readers and a narrative voice disguising itself as an authorial one, results in readers being simultaneously invited to sympathize with these narrative voices, being aware of them as interpretative mediators, and being let in on a "behind-the-scene" look at the writing process. In *Little Travels*, Thackeray's narrator, Michael Angelo Titmarsh, addresses his

narrative to his wife "Juliana,"[18] but also to a greater imaginary readership, since, like Thackeray, he hopes to publish these private "letters."[19] As will be shown in my analysis of Titmarsh's role as organizer and interpreter of the visual material he accumulates in Belgium, the narrator's preoccupations and his approach to arranging his material do not, as Segel suggests, *disguise* the "essentially commercial relationship" between readers and authorial and narrative voices but, instead, they refer to it and question its effects on travel writing as a literary genre. Thackeray's singular use of Titmarsh and The Fat Contributor enables him to distance himself from the ideological stance of his narrators, giving him greater freedom to criticize both the Belgians and the British. Thackeray creates two narrators who, through satire, mock the people and places they come across, but the text's more subtle humor stems from Thackeray's own questioning of these narrators' command of their material, their abilities to make sense of it and, more importantly perhaps, their attempts at finding an "adequate" way to present it to their audience at a time when the genre of travel narratives was undergoing significant changes.

To make sense of these narratorial difficulties, it is worth contextualizing the form of *Little Travels* and *Papers* and relating their publication to the history of nineteenth century travel guides and personal narratives. Titmarsh and The Fat Contributor's descriptions, their pieces of down-to-earth advice, their following of (and offer to follow) an itinerary (even a seemingly random one), not to mention their direct references to Murray's guides, connect Thackeray's Belgian narratives to the rise of modern guide books. As Pieter Francois explains, "During the second half of the 1830s, the market for travel guides underwent some profound changes. These changes were largely, but not solely, a consequence of the publication of *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent* by John Murray in 1836" (82). In *Little Travels* and *Papers*,

18 A potential mirror for Thackeray's own wife and customary addressee, Isabella Shawe.
19 See, "I ask any gentleman who reads this—the letters to my Juliana being written with an eye to publication—to remember especially how…" (331)

Thackeray does more than surf on the wave of Murray's financial popularity, as his narrators question this new popular format of travel writing as much as they pretend to envy it.

Just like in *Cornhill to Cairo*, Titmarsh "refers constantly to various guidebooks he is using" (Hampson 215). Instead of writing a travel narrative hiding the influence of its competitors, Thackeray offers one whose multiple references to them, directly or through style, invites its readers to reflect on the absurdities of the genre, but also its potential for manipulation. He also does so by investigating (and poking fun at) his narrator's attempts at exploring alternatives. While Thackeray's narratives are set in a blooming guide-books market, they also exhibit the influence of the personal account, a form of travel writing rooted in the Romantic experience. In the 1840s, such travel accounts were struggling to remain marketable, as cheaper travel and better-performing modes of transportation meant a widening of travel narratives' audiences to readers increasingly interested in the more practical, down-to-earth aspects of travel. The rise of travel guides like Murray's directly impacted the form of these old-fashioned competitors: "Whereas the existence and availability of more detailed guidebooks make it easier to write an account in the short run, the marked improvement in the quality of these guidebooks in the long run forced travel accounts to abandon full descriptions of sights and focus instead on the author's experiences." (Francois 80) In other words, as a broader access to tourism (and modern guide books) meant that formerly "foreign" places were becoming increasingly better-known (by both travelers and non-travelers alike), and as their minute, factual descriptions were becoming increasingly interchangeable from one guide to another, choosing to set aside factual descriptions and focusing on personal experience became a way to stand out.

Both *Papers* and *Little Travels* exhibit and explore the effects of such shifts as their narrators attempt—often awkwardly—to relate their experiences abroad. In *Papers*, the editor's

opening note, constructing a second narrative persona made up by Thackeray, refers to the struggle of navigating the changing market of travel narratives: “As far as” the narrator’s “tour goes at present,” writes the fictitious editor, “it certainly is, if not novel, at least treated in a novel manner; for the reader will remark that there is not a word about the places visited by our friend, while there is a prodigious deal of information regarding himself” (86). Here, the editor's note humorously promises a marked reversal of what would be expected from Murray's “handbooks:” a complete rejection of factual, “encyclopedic” travel data (“not a word about the places visited”) in favor of a similarly complete and (comically) “encyclopedic” focus on the narrator's personal experience (“a prodigious deal of information regarding himself”). The mention of expected reader interest for such solely personal experience hints at the possible (even if hardly “novel”) appeal of a more subjective narrator as well as anticipates (and feeds into) the Victorian reader’s potential doubts about the interest value of Belgium as subject matter (“not a word about the places visited”). While the editor's promise does not materialize, his claim that a narrative on Belgium might be more interesting if solely focusing on its British narrator hints that the Low Country might be at best a secondary theme of the narrative. Seemingly in line with what Francois observes, Thackeray's fictitious editor thus assumes that The Fat Contributor has chosen to be one of “the writers of travel accounts [who] increasingly left all factual descriptions of sights out of their accounts, focusing more on the impressions and experiences of the author” (Francois 86) as an attempt to stand out in a market increasingly dominated by Murray-like material. As the tone in both narratives makes clear, that choice has as much to do with Belgium's boring familiarity as with other concerns, such as the narrator's cynicism or his refusal to embrace the modern guide book's apparent insistence on facticity.

Contrary to the Fat Contributor, who is unapologetically (and comically) self-centered in his descriptions of the Belgian other, Titmarsh oscillates between factual descriptions and personal impressions, between the desire to reflect on his own impressions, provide factual information and depict his sights of Belgium in the style and language of the Romantic travel-writing tradition. Thackeray used the term "guide-book" when describing his Belgian project to his mother (Ray, *Letters*, vol 2, 463). In Antwerp, Titmarsh notes how much such existing travel guides simultaneously inform and restrict his subject choices as a narrator:

> As many hundreds of thousands of English visit this city (I have met at least a hundred of them in this half-hour walking the streets, "Guide-Book" in hand), and as the ubiquitous Murray has already depicted the place, there is no need to enter into a long description of it, its neatness, its beauty, and its stiff antique splendour. (304)

The mise-en-abyme created by Thackeray's reference to another travel guide about Belgium within Titmarsh's own attempt at writing one underlines the ubiquity of this form of narrative in the tourist-narrator's perception of the Other. Titmarsh is one of those "travel writers [who] found their omnipresence often annoying and were envious of their impressive sales figures"[20] (Francois 86) and is shown simultaneously imitating Murray's style and distancing himself from it. At the root of Titmarsh's anger[21] also lies the recognition that the visual omnipresence of

20 Francois, collapsing Thackeray and Titmarsh into a single authorial entity, notes,"Whereas he [Thackeray] praised Murray for providing accurate information, he also claimed that after reading it, he no longer felt the desire to describe what he saw. Such feelings of despondency could in some cases turn into a rebellious attitude toward the authority of the guidebook." (Francois 87)

21 The Fat Contributor, too, mentions Murray: "Buy nothing! Get a reading of Murray's Guide-book from your neighbor, and be independent and happy" (76). There is an irony at play when one compares this comment with Francois's analysis and Titmarsh's comments. While the Fat Contributor refers to freedom from physical goods when talking about "independence" (he had previously described the tribulations of British tourists painfully trying to travel with artefacts of British culture ("the Metropolitan Magazine, a teapot, and a ham" (76)), on a figurative level, given the influence of Murray's guide-book on touristic itineraries, the tourists using it became far from independent in their sight-seeing endeavors.

Murray's guide-books goes hand in hand with a touristic experience robbed of its uniqueness. His narratorial dilemma is rooted in the recognition of Murray's success—at a time when the notion of "mass-tourism" is starting to emerge—as proof of the prevalence of a factual, impersonal narrative approach to the cosmopolitan experience, and his uncertainty about his own appeal to the Romantic tradition, with its focus on unique, profound personal experience, as a viable narrative alternative. Titmarsh's occasional "loss for words" when trying to describe sights—a Romantic cliché in itself—often actually reveals how, in a time of intense commodification and homogenization, 1840s travel writers might also simply not have anything to say that has not been said before. Through his mention of Murray in Brussels, he also recognizes that, whether one deals with a destination as familiar to Britain as Belgium or with one as exotic as Egypt, one is bound to tread the path of other travel-writers and view things from the standpoint of a "pre-existing commentary" (Hampson 215). Titmarsh repeatedly questions the need to "describe what he saw," but frequently resorts to doing so anyway. Thus, his awkward, sometimes comically inconsistent narrative approach to his Belgian material stems from Thackeray's pretense to emulate the factual thoroughness of the modern travel guides while also describing Titmarsh's experiences simultaneously as unique (as they affect him personally), repeatable (as the results of unavoidable widespread touristic commodification), interesting, and humorous (as a mirror of his narrator's own personality, prejudices and expectations).

Aside from their narration, Thackeray's Belgian narratives differ structurally from his other two sketchbooks. The *Irish Sketchbook* offers a circular structure: a touring narrator starts and ends his trip in Dublin, reflecting on what he has learned through his visit of the Irish countryside. His accumulated experience influences his final vision of Ireland and its

Catholicism.[22] In *From Cornhill to Cairo*, the linear structure is goal-oriented from the start: rather than going full-circle, the narrator experiences how stopovers bring him further away from Britain and closer to an imagined "heart" of the Orient. This structure echoes his growing expectations about a (fantasized) Other and ends with the disappointing recognition that prior (literary) preconceptions had unavoidably overblown them.

In *Little Travels* and *Papers*, on the other hand, the various Belgian sections appear randomly arranged, interchangeable, if not disposable. Multiple sights covered in *Little Travels* are left out from *Papers*. The Fat Contributor decides upon the trip out of boredom. Once in Belgium, he quickly relates his desire to go home ("Why did I come away? If there had been a gig at the door that instant to carry me to my native country, I would have jumped in. But there is no hope" (77). His comment, "I will go to Dover to-morrow … and take the first packet that goes —that goes anywhere" (70), echoes the title of the sub-section in *Little Travels*, "On board the 'Antwerpen,' off everywhere" (299) as they both present Belgium as a transitory space, not a desired goal. As illustrated by Thackeray's avoidance from calling his work "The Belgian Sketchbook," his initial plan to call it "a little book on Belgium *& the Rhine*" (Ray, *Letters,* vol 2, 463, my emphasis), and the noncommittal subtitle of *Papers* ("Wanderings of our Fat Contributor"), leave readers to wonder whether either text is meant to present Belgium as worthy of exploration for itself. The night before leaving for Ostend, the comically blasé Fat Contributor notes, "A monster has just told me that a vessel starts at seven for Ostend: I will take it. I would take one for Jericho if it started at six" (73), exemplifying his limited investment in his current destination (while anticipating the next). Likewise, in a nostalgia-imbued tone reminiscent of that of William Crimsworth in Brontë's *The Professor* (1857) as he leaves his British hotel, Titmarsh,

22 For a discussion on this process, see Susan Ray.

after staying at "the comfortablest, quietest, cheapest, neatest little inns in England" (297) departs "with deep regret, believing that [he] should see nothing so pleasant as its gardens, and its veal cutlets, and its dear little bowling-green, elsewhere" (297-8). While he eventually decides that "the time comes when people must go out of town" (298), it is fair to say that leaving for Belgium is described more as an obligation than a treat.[23]

Belgium's centrality on the Continent and its transportation infrastructure make it a convenient starting point to explore the rest of Europe and it becomes for both narrators a first step towards the grander project of journeying to the Orient. But their trips within Belgium itself seem aimless, as they hop from town to town indeed going "anywhere" and "everywhere." This apparent structural randomness directly echoes the narrators' struggles with arranging their Belgian material in ways that would give it a sense of narrative purpose, and is a reflection of their difficulty dealing with an Other, mid-nineteenth century Belgium, that is both foreign and highly familiar, potentially "quaint," yet markedly altered by mass (British) tourism. This is a Belgium about which so much is already known.

One way for the narrators (and Thackeray) to inject uniqueness—as well as humor and critique—into a narrative about such a familiar space is by observing the participants in mass tourism. The narrators' choice to regularly set aside factual information about their touristic destination and focus not only on their own, but also other individuals' experiences creates room for a satire that reveals these tourists' personalities, morality, humanity and, sometimes, intelligence. Belgium, in both its otherness as a foreign country and its familiarity as an unthreatening neighbor, becomes a backdrop for a "social experiment," in which members of the

23 Titmarsh feels confined in his London social circles, and the Fat Contributor leaves because his doctor worries about his weight ("'You look as white as a sheet—as puffy as a lobster—this season you've grown so inordinately gross and fa–' It's a word I can't bear applied to myself. I wrote letters round to decline my dinners; and agreed to go—But whither? Why not to Brighton?" [68]), then leaves for Ostend after feeling underwhelmed by Dover.

higher and higher-middle classes directly rub shoulders with members of the middle and lower-middle classes. This proximity is one that the historical trajectory of cross-Channel travel at the time made possible. As Francois notes,

> Travelers between the 1830's and 1840's were resolutely middle-class . . . but it is too soon to claim that middle-class tourism had become dominant. A thoroughly mixed traveling class is closer to the truth. Upper-class tourists were still present, although they were very likely overrepresented among travel writers compared with their presence in the overall group of travelers. (75-6)

Differences in social classes come into play in *Little Travels* through Titmarsh's description of travelers' interactions, among themselves and in reaction to the tourist industry in general, and his own status as a "cockney" narrator observing—and taking part in—these interactions.

Comedy dominates the first section of *Little Travels.* It describes the boat trip connecting two waterways that serve as clear national markers (the Thames and the Schledt) joined by an inter-national waterway (the Channel) and thus taking place in a liminal space of uncertain national character. Setting foot on the "Antwerpen" leads to a transformative process in which passengers seem to be not quite as "properly British" as expected, but also not as immersed into (touristic) Continental culture as they will be later. Leaving the spatially restricted, controlled "tunnel" of the Thames to enter the open, tumultuous waters of the Channel, British tourists are shown going along uncritically with the touristic "program" imposed on them,[24] even if it means abandoning British etiquette. This section uses Titmarsh in his full potential as a "fictitious

24 The place is cramped ("We are, I assure yo, no less than 170 noblemen and gentlemen together" [299]), resources are scarce ("Titmarsh . . . with a great mattress on his shoulders, knowing full well that were he to relinquish it for an instant, some other person would seize on it" [303]) and sea-sickness is repeatedly alluded to, but any critique of the discomfort of travel is shown cut short by an industry of mass tourism eager to distract its clients.

author-narrator" or "comic narrative persona" (Siegel 62), to investigate these shifts in interpersonal relations and social interactions resulting from the travelers' presence in such unusual space.

At the heart of the critique is Thackeray's playful representation of class-based behaviors. For instance, meals and the passengers' sudden lack of decorum surrounding them question clichés of British good manners and self-control. The pull of instinctual needs over social conventions is reflected in the first line of the section, when Titmarsh notes, "We have bidden adieu to Billingsgate, we have passed the Thames Tunnel: it is one o'clock, and of course people are thinking of being hungry . . . [W]hat an appetite every one seems to have!" (299). Appetite, which the reader might be tempted to metaphorically connect with a touristic appetite for novelty and adventure, quickly gets out of hand, as is subsequently exposed by the succession of frantic meals, the appeal of which seems to be stemming as much from an intellectual process ("thinking of being hungry") as from real physical need. These meals anticipate a vision of touristic material as primarily objects of quick consumption. Striking about them is the speed at which they get out of control and the eagerness with which they are awaited as distractions to thoughts. Titmarsh's experience of "the second dinner" is a case in point:

> "Law bless you, sir, it's the second dinner. Make haste, or you won't get a place." At which words a genteel party, with whom I had been conversing, instantly tumbled down the hatchway, I find myself one of the second relay of seventy who are attacking the boiled salmon, boiled beef, boiled cabbage, &c. As for the ducks, I certainly had some pease, very fine yellow stiff pease, that ought to have been split before they were boiled; but, with regards to the ducks, I saw the

> animals gobbled up before my eyes by an old widow lady and her party just as I was shrieking to the steward to bring a knife and fork to carve them. (301)

Thackeray's satire resides in how quickly the facade of British decorum crumbles when faced with the fear of missing out (the "genteel party . . . instantly tumbled down the hatchway"), the analogies to animalistic frenzy, and the way the narrator himself proves unable to resist similar impulses (despite a formerly disapproving tone). Titmarsh's weakness humanizes him, but also complicates his position as both a "victim" and a "perpetrator" of mass tourism (as a tourist himself, and the would-be writer of a guide directed to the masses). Titmarsh might seem to embrace a form of "snobbish anti-tourism" (Buzard 5) in his narratorial approach, but, as Chappell notes about *From Cornhill to Cairo*, he is also more often than not "part of the satire, enlarging the text's critique of mass tourism to encompass educated travel" (Chapell 586).

The Fat Contributor describes similar comically chaotic scenes in Ostend, where travelers disembark from the ship and gather their suitcases:

> While the couriers, commissioners, footmen, gentlemen, ladies'-maids, Scotchman with the shirt-collar, the resuscitated Oxford youth, the family of nine, and the whole ship's passengers are struggling, puffing, stamping, squeezing, bawling, cursing, tumbling over their boxes and one another's shins, losing their keys, screaming to the commissioners, having their treasures unfolded, their wonderful packed boxes unpacked so that it is impossible ever to squeeze the articles back into their receptacles again; while there is such a scene of Babel clatter and confusion around me, ah! let me thank Heaven that I have but a carpet-bag! (76)

In both *Little Travels* and *Papers*, the narrators satirize the discrepancy between the passengers' efforts to act as if the boat trip was a social event like any they would attend in London and their undignified actions. Thackeray hints that this captive audience might also be the victim of (mercantile) forces it is too blind to acknowledge, let alone control.[25] The disorganized way the travelers are being dispatched on land, the scarcity of the food and services offered on board, the unhelpful crew and the overall feeling of crowdedness, all echo a system of impersonal, profit-focused mass tourism.

While forcing British members of various classes to cohabit, the short boat trip does not create opportunities for the latter to truly mingle. The humor of the texts, but also their further social critique, lies in the narrator's repeated hints that these travelers appear to experience a form of Continental social equality via their common treatment by the vulgar tourist industry. As they embark on the journey, they might all share a sense of cosmopolitan wonder that goes across their differences, but, in the end, British social distinctions ultimately remain (sometimes comically) unchanged. While classes and nationalities mix, and while this mix might appear to blur lines (both middle and higher classes are "equal" when faced with the downsides of the touristic business), the emphasis is put on the wish to (re)establish difference as soon as the necessity of physical proximity disappears. The "scene(s) of Babel clatter and confusion" (76), while resulting from the shared painful experience of mass tourism, divides protagonists as much as it unites them.

25 Note the metaphors equating these travelers to cattle, led by an unknown force to move to particular areas of the boat at particular times (such as when "the feeding begins" [299]), when tourists are left to fight for themselves in a jungle-like environment ("I saw the animals gobbled up before my eyes" [301]), or metaphorically mistreated and forced to roam the deck to find their own place to sleep. The middle- and higher-class passengers described by the Fat Contributor, "struggling, puffing, stamping, squeezing, bawling, cursing, tumbling . . . screaming" are, Thackeray implies, not very different than the actual cattle onboard Titmarsh's ship, the "huge penful of Durham oxen, lying on hay and surrounded by a barricade of oars," "fifteen . . . horned monsters [who] maintain an incessant mooing and bellowing." (300)

Throughout *Little Travels* and *Papers*, Thackeray makes clear that the coastal "dispersion" of British tourists is always temporary, as their narrators record repeatedly running into the same British tourists on the Continent. This vision and critique of modern tourists as a uniform whole (despite social differences) goes hand in hand with both a critique of mass tourism in general and, I argue, a more specific questioning of commercial travel writing as encouraging such uniformity (holding Murray's book, as we have seen, becomes a "signal" of belonging to that uniform group). The boat trip across the Channel, the Belgian guided tours and the British Murray guide books are all presented as different aspects of a singular global touristic economy where the traveler's individuality becomes gradually erased, not to be replaced by a sense of shared cosmopolitan identity and wonder, but rather by a feeling of commercial, bland uniformity of mass-touristic Continental experience. Neither Titmarsh nor the Fat Contributor are truly able to step outside of the manipulations to which mass tourism subjects them. Unlike Romantic writers, and despite their implied recognition of such discomfort, blandness and repeatability, neither decides to switch to an exploration of the "paths less trodden." However, they do attempt to offer resistance by occasionally adopting the stance of onlookers and, more importantly, attempting to return to a more "personal" and Romantically-inspired account of travel writing.

These attempts, however, often comically fail. For instance, the theme of hunger discussed above is also used to short-circuit narratorial attempts to recast (uncomfortable and rather mundane) travel experiences in Romantic terms. Titmarsh's narrative inability exposes the text's own attempts (and failures) at adopting a consistent style as a travel guide/travel narrative. Let us consider, for example, the following passages:

> The air was delightfully fresh, the sky of a faultless cobalt, the river shining and flashing like quicksilver, and at this period steward runs against me bearing two great smoking dishes covered by two great glistening hemispheres of tin.
> 'Fellow,' says I, 'what's that?'
> He lifted up the cover: it was duck and green pease, by jingo! (300)

> The sun is sinking, and, as he drops, the ingenious luminary sets the Thames on fire: several worthy gentlemen, watch in hand, are eagerly examining the phenomena attending his disappearance,—rich clouds of purple and gold, that form the curtain of his bed,—little barks that pass black across his disc every instant dropping near and nearer, into the water. 'There he goes!' says one sagacious observer. 'No, he doesn't,' cries another. Now he is gone, and the steward is already threading the deck, asking the passengers, right and left, if they will take a little supper. What a grand object is a sunset, and what a wonder is an appetite at sea! (302)

Humorously juxtaposed are Titmarsh's efforts at aestheticising his sights in the painterly and sublime terms of the Romantics ("a faultless cobalt," "shining and flashing like quicksilver," "sets the Thames on fire," "rich clouds of purple and gold") and renewed mentions of food, combined with the loud reactions from surrounding "sagacious observers" seeing in the sunset an opportunity to test and compare scientific predictions. The reduction of the sunset to a meteorological process by other travelers, the interruption in the narrator's lofty train of thought created by the mention of food and his surprisingly positive reaction to it,[26] as well as his

26 In *Papers*, the Fat Contributor (whose constant appetite associates him with the food-obsessed tourists Titmarsh describes) comically goes so far as describing interruptions by food as a prerequisite for the proper enjoyment of visual experience: "Is not the sight of a good comfortable breakfast more lovely than any landscape in any country? . . . An empty stomach makes blank eyes. If you would enjoy exterior objects well . . . let your inner man be

readiness to abandon his aestheticising project, all force readers to consider how cliched his Romantic attempts at seeking sublimity in these landscapes really are in the first place. Aesthetic and intellectual sustenance are quickly abandoned in favor of a more modern (albeit mundane) desire for immediate, material (and literal) consumption.

A comparable, yet different comic set-up is found in *Papers*. The Fat Contributor muses, when observing the seashore that "All Ostend is there, sitting before the Restaurant, and sipping ices as the sun descends into the western wave. Look at his round disc as it sinks into the blushing waters!" (79) But he then follows with the unexpected observation,

> [L]ook, too, at that fat woman bathing—as round as the sun. She wears a brown dressing-gown—two bathers give her each a hand—she advances backwards towards the coming wave, and as it reaches her—plop! she sits down in it … She is succeeded by other stout nymphs, disporting in the waves. For hours and hours the Ostenders look on at this enchanting sight. (79)

The poetic experience of the Fat Contributor, at first using painterly language to describe his sights ("round disc," "blushing waters") is short-circuited by the behavior of other tourists. But unlike Titmarsh, he decides not to switch subjects, and instead incorporates the new comic sights into his poetic vision, turning the "fat woman bathing" "as round as the sun" into "nymphs" in "this enchanting sight," and creating a deeply satiric tone. The set-up for the scene already anticipates the short-circuiting of the scene's Romantic potential: what could have been a special, private moment is experienced "en masse" ("All Ostend is there") and food, always within reach ("sitting before the Restaurant"), is presented as a welcome distraction ("sipping ices") within a sun-setting scene which, Thackeray implies, blasé modern travelers might not find enjoyable

comfortable" (79-80).

enough on its own. The bathing scene is a distraction from a poetic moment that has become cliché and, in the world of mass-tourism, tourists have now become the primary entertainment of other tourists.

While the Romantic special connection of a narrator with his/her natural environment is lost, it is, as a literary device, also shown to have become a commodity among others. *Little Travels* shows how Titmarsh can choose to turn to and away from it at leisure and without real personal investment. He has become, as a tourist and a narrator, a blasé spectator precisely because mass tourism and its agents (travel companies and modern guide books) have both dulled his senses and heightened his expectations to impossible standards. This makes him, in turn, an unconvinced and, therefore, unconvincing "Romantic" narrator. The global travel industry—at work in travel guides as well as onboard "The Antwerpen"—forces the modern narrator into the paradoxical position of hoping to create and share readerly excitement through what might seem time-tested literary conventions, while simultaneously revealing that these conventions have become, under such commercial pressure, the tired and disposable clichés of literary commodities. As in twenty-first century trendsetters' use of social media, the narrative focus and attention-span of Titmarsh, unconsciously worried about his content's immediate "reach," repeatedly sounds superficial and insincere.

Thackeray uses a similar device in *From Cornhill to Cairo* when, as its narrator approaches the Great Pyramids, the sublime is swiftly undermined by culinary preoccupations stealing the narrative spotlight: "There they lay, rosy and solemn in the distance—those old, majestic, mystical, familiar edifices. Several of us tried to be impressed; but breakfast supervening, a rush was made at the coffee and cold pies, and the sentiment of awe was lost in the scramble for victuals" (226). Titmarsh, be he in Belgium or journeying in Egypt is indeed

shown “tr[ying]] to be impressed” because he hopes excitement might become contagious to his readers. This similarity of experience (and narratorial process) across these two texts strikingly exposes Thackeray's vision of mid-Victorian touristic experience as increasingly uniform wherever it takes place. One cannot help but feel that a whole structure of intellectual/cultural values is being homogenized: one would have *expected* Titmarsh's treatment of the exotic pyramids to differ from that of a Belgian sunset (however beautiful) but, in the end, they are both similarly glossed over as one among many touristic commodities.

Thackeray combines this undermining of the Romantic potential with a gradual undermining of clichés directly related to British literary and political perceptions of Belgium. One such cliché the author shatters under the guise of Titmarsh’s comic awkwardness is that of “Gothic” Belgium. Pre-Revolutionary Belgium, as a Roman Catholic nation with a rich medieval history, had been an inviting backdrop for early gothic narratives.[27] Titmarsh’s treatment of two locales connectable to such early-Gothic imaginings, the Beguine College in Ghent and the religious hospital in Bruges, are striking for their contradictions. Unsurprisingly, what first grabs his attention and fills his imagination is their Gothic potential. Attending a service in Ghent, Titmarsh seems mesmerized by “at least five hundred [nuns] in white veils … seated all around about us in mute contemplation … looking very solemn, and white, and ghastly, like an army of tombstones by moonlight” (322). The altar then “become(s) quite gloomy in the sunset” and the organ starts playing “the most lugubrious chants.” Titmarsh, watching “the novices wear[ing] black veils” (322) walking by, catches a sight that suddenly piques his interest:

27 One example is Thomas Colley Grattan's 1831 *The Heiress of Bruges*. The best-selling novel popularized a typical romanticization of old Belgian towns, at a time when early-Gothic narratives vilifying Roman Catholicism were often set in Italy or Spain.

> I saw a young, sad handsome face; it was the only thing in the establishment that was the least romantic or gloomy: and, for the sake of any reader of a sentimental turn, let us hope that the poor soul has been crossed in love, and that over some soul-stirring tragedy that black curtain has fallen. (322-3)

Playing with the early-Gothic (and anti-Catholic) trope of the secretive, beautiful nun with questionable freedom of movement (the old romances of Horace Walpole or Matthew Lewis come to mind), Titmarsh exposes his literary knowledge and expectations. The passage is reminiscent of another recounted in the *Irish Sketchbook* where, during a visit to an Ursuline Convent, Titmarsh becomes prone to similar romanticized visions and makes their literary connection explicit:

> [W]e came into a long, clean, lofty passage, with many little doors on each side; and here I confess my heart began to thump again. These were the doors of the cells of the Sisters. Bon Dieu! and is it possible that I shall see a nun's cell? Do I not recollect the nun's cell in "The Monk," or in "The Romance of the Forest? " or, if not there, at any rate, in a thousand noble romances, read in early days of half-holiday perhaps — romances at twopence a volume.
>
> Come in, in the name of the saints! Here is the cell … here was the place where the poor black-veiled things were to pass their lives for ever! (69)

Emotions seem to run high, but the otherwise prosaic outcome of this (empty) cell visit, the tidiness of the place ("comfortable curtains," "neatly cleaned" "clothes-chest," "little religious pictures" [69]) and the fact that the narrator's fears dissipate as soon as he is ushered on in his touristic visit, all exhibit the superficiality of this initial response. This scene is to its Belgian

echo what Titmarsh's description of the pyramids was to the Belgian sunset, and their juxtaposition illustrates further the presumption of transnational, transcultural interchangeability of narratorial experience. While Titmarsh's reflections on Catholicism admittedly play a much more central role in the *Irish Sketchbook* than in *Little Travels*, his reaction to the Ursuline Convent, like that during his visit to the Beguine chapel, needs to be primarily interpreted as a mere "exercise in Gothic imagination" (Hampson 216). The recounting of Titmarsh's Ghent visit tells us a lot more about what he wishes he could see in Belgium than what he actually sees (the latter being generally benign and unthreatening). Titmarsh's Romantic train-of-thought is no match for his honest realization, as a spectator-actor in his own travel narrative, that he is only dealing with short-lived, wishful projections. Despite his earlier musing, Titmarsh is quick to describe this fleeting glimpse as the "only thing … that was the least romantic or gloomy," and hints that he might have decided to point it out mainly "for the sake of any reader of a sentimental turn." This invites his readers to understand the scene as gothic/romantic in its potential but not its actuality.

The scene's outcome further undermines the Gothic potential of the Ghent chapel scene. As the nuns "approach [his group] with a very mysterious air" (322), Titmarsh ponders, "Were we doing anything wrong, I wondered? Were they come to that part of the service where heretics and infidels ought to quit the church? What have you to ask, O sacred, white-veiled maid?" (322) As he pokes fun at Roman Catholicism and the overall seriousness of the nuns' appearance, Titmarsh still creates suspense in his narrative. The reason why the British tourists are being approached (the nuns ask them for money to support the Church) puts a rapid end to this illusion of Romantic suspense, undermining the literary pretense of the text and, in general, shedding light on how such literary projections clash with the reality of modern Belgium. Furthermore, the

monetary exchange described in the passage places Titmarsh's visit, which readers could have perceived as almost intimate, firmly back in the realm of mass tourism. The imagery of the "veil" here serves only to momentarily cover up the mundane, the expected, and quickly gives way to the unexciting reality of running the Beguine College as a capitalist enterprise, a form of touristic entertainment which British tourists are expected to pay for.

Little Travels, when its narrator takes his focus away from other British tourists and places it onto Belgium itself, cannot escape the pull of such literary and painterly medieval aestheticization. After pointing out, at the start of his section on Antwerp, that copying Murray's style would not bring anything new to the table ("there is no need to enter into a long description" [304]), and in line with what Thackeray mentions in his Belgian letters as the superiority of visual experience over book-reading,[28] Titmarsh proceeds to describe his sights of the city's landmark through his own words. The latter's factual, impersonal character, however, makes them sound highly interchangeable with those already used by others. Faced with the difficulty of trying to describe originally what "at least a hundred" other English tourists are seeing at the same time as he is, Titmarsh instead proceeds to comment on the quaintness of the city's people, its painters and, last but not least, its history. Just as Longfellow, in "The Belfry of Brugges" (1846), describes how his visit to Bruges conjures "visions of the days departed" that make those "who live in history only seem . . . to walk the earth again," Titmarsh notes about Antwerp that, "at ten o'clock the whole city is quiet; and so little changed does it seem to be, that you may walk back three hundred years into time, and fancy yourself a majestical Spaniard, or an oppressed and patriotic Dutchman at your leisure" (304). Mid-century Victorian travel narratives about Belgium regularly went hand in hand with freezing the country in its medieval

28 See, "Seeing is certainly better than book-reading; it would be a good plan I think for a man in my trade to give up reading altogether for, say, a year: and see with nobody else's eyes but his own." (Ray, *Letters*, vol 2, 118)

past. There are, however, a few elements that distinguish Thackeray's narrative persona from that of Longfellow. Instead of describing the Belgian landmarks as conjuring the "phantoms" of the Belgian past as another, distinct spectacle, Thackeray's narrator imagines *himself* becoming one of these historical characters. Not only does Titmarsh seem to reduce modern Belgium to its past, he also imagines its historical figures as so many exotic persona he can enter as part of his imaginary play, a work of imagination and cultural appropriation that becomes a form of touristic entertainment ("at your leisure"). In this passage, Thackeray refers to issues related both to the Romantic tradition of travel writing (in the form of a unique, almost transcendental "connection" between the narrator and his environment) and the modern guide-book. Travel guides similarly turned to historical anecdotes and often incorporated them as a form of "virtual tour guide" within their more practical touristic information. Here, Titmarsh's impulse is shown to have less to do with educating readers and becomes instead another form of commodity available for playful touristic entertainment, just like, Thackeray hints, the tidbits of historical knowledge shared in guide-books. Titmarsh's reveries fall flat, however, further showcasing the disconnect between the kind of expectations which Romantic travelogues as well as commercial travel guides are all attempting to evoke (for different reasons), and the reality of travel. Whereas the visions of Longfellow's lyric speaker are conjured up by the music from the old tower, Titmarsh's vision of himself as "a majestical Spaniard," or a "patriotic Dutchman" is interrupted by a very different musical performance:

> There is a sound of singing—singing at midnight. Is it Don Sombrero, who is singing an Andalusian seguidilla under the window of the Flemish burgomaster's daughter? Ah, no! it is a fat Englishman in a zephyr coat: he is drinking cold gin-

and-water in the moonlight, and warbling softly—"... N-ix my dolly, pals, fake a-a-away." (304)

Just as Titmarsh's sublime landscape descriptions were cut short by the incessant feeding of passengers, his attempt to romanticize his Belgian medieval environment is undermined by an element that forces him back to contemporaneity, and echoes the inescapable downsides of mass tourism for his travel experience. Thackeray's narrative forces readers sharing similar forms of literary expectations to partake in Titmarsh's reverie and, like him, to be disappointed—but also amused—by the discrepancy. Thackeray's message is not only that these expectations are bound to be disappointed (which, in turn, ridicules the travel narratives attempting to foster them), but they are thwarted by the lowest example of tourism itself: a fat, drunk Englishman, representative of the "many hundred thousands" of English tourists roaming the city.[29]

After leaving Antwerp and approaching Brussels by train, other forms of "reality checks" interfere with Titmarsh's initial narrative with interesting implications for a study of Thackeray's representation of Belgium:

> Through smiling corn-fields, then, and by little woods from which rose here and there the quaint peaked towers of some old-fashioned *chateaux*, our train went smoking along at thirty miles an hour. We caught a glimpse of Mechlin steeple, at first dark against the sunset, and afterwards bright as we came to the other side of it, and admired long glistening canals or moats that surrounded the queer old

29 Thackeray's choice of song, Ainsworth's "Nix my Dolly, Pals, Fake Away" (1834), is itself a reference to the process of commodified romanticization. The song, disguised as an authentic, older ballad of low-life individuals was an elaborate fake (Gatrell 146). In this mise-en-abyme of ironies and references, Titmarsh appeals to vivid, personal, Romantic impressions as a more engaging alternative to more factual approaches to describing the Belgian past. His process is interrupted and undermined by an example of a similar literary attempt to artificially mimic the past for the superficial enjoyment of contemporary audiences. In Brussels, Titmarsh playfully pretending to be a Spaniard is interrupted by another Englishman drunkenly pretending to be low-life.

> town, and were lighted up in that wonderful way which the sun only understands, and not even Mr. Turner, with all his vermillion and gamboge, can put down on canvas. The verdure was everywhere astonishing, and we fancied we saw golden Cuyps as we passed by these quiet pastures.
>
> Steam-engines and their accompaniments, blazing forges, gaunt manufactories, with numberless windows and long black chimneys, of course take away from the romance of the place; but, as we whirled into Brussels, even these engines had a fine appearance. Three or four of the snorting, galloping monsters had just finished their journey, and there was a quantity of flaming ashes lying under the brazen bellies of each that looked properly lurid and demonical. The men at the station came out with flaming torches—awful-looking fellows indeed! Presently the different baggage was handed out, and in the very worst vehicle I ever entered, and at the very slowest pace, we were borne to the "Hotel de Suede...." (309-310)

As he looks out the window, Titmarsh tries to safely view his environment as a mere "distanced pictorial spectacle" (Chard 37). At first, he eases back into a narrative voice eager to aestheticize the Belgian landscape (one reminiscent of Rossetti's own poetic persona as he crosses Belgium by rail). The details he notices emphasize the Belgian landscape's quaint, bucolic nature ("smiling corn-fields," "little woods," "glistening canals," "quiet pastures"), its medieval past ("peaked towers," "old-fashioned *chateaux*," "moats") and, last but not least, its painterly, sublime qualities ("sunset," a town "lighted up in that wonderful way which the sun only understands). The aestheticization of the narrator's vision is a common device for Thackeray, who enjoyed "obvious advantages" in "pictorial framing" as a "trained artist" (Hampson 216).

However, once we separate Thackeray from his narrator, we may find Titmarsh's descriptions rather forced, even when posing as a post-Romantic narrator. Despite remarking that "not even Mr. Turner" would be able to "put [this landscape] down on canvas," (an example of the Romantic propensity for "hyperboles of the unrepresentable") or noting that "the topography resists all efforts at description," Titmarsh still "happily proceed[s] to describe it" (Chard 84-85). This contradiction highlights the awkward artificiality of his narratorial endeavors as a travel writer, as well as illustrates the shift between the early nineteenth century, when "picturesqueness [was] celebrated as a mark of culturally valuable 'authenticity,'" and "about mid-century [when] the picturesque and pictorial were signs of a superficial and imitative ('touristic') attitude" (Buzard 192).

In a direct echo of Belgium's shift from an agricultural economy to an industrial one in the early nineteenth century, the text registers a shift in Titmarsh's vision, as his bucolic descriptions give way to accounts of the country's participation in the Industrial Revolution.[30] Suddenly, as "Steam-engines," "blazing forges," "gaunt manufactories" and "long black chimneys" make their appearance and "of course take away from the romance of the place," Titmarsh is forced to interrupt his touristic clichés and face a Belgium that is unapologetically rooted in contemporary industrialism. Like Romantic painters of the Industrial Revolution,[31] Titmarsh realizes that an honest description of contemporary Belgium should juxtapose the bucolic countryside with the inferno-like edifices of industrialization, and the latter become themselves the subject of a form of sublime aestheticization. Titmarsh is shown mesmerized by the colorful "flaming ashes lying under the brazen bellies of each [train]," despite their "properly

30 The "glistening canals" can be interpreted twofold. They convey an Arcadian image of Belgium as peacefully stuck in the past but their mention, to a 19th-century reader, would also have been connected to the rise of industrialization in the Low Countries, to which efficient access to waterways was central.
31 Philip James De Loutherbourg's *Coalbrookdale by Night* (1801) comes to mind.

lurid and demonical" appearance. The trains, the "snorting, galloping monsters," become both a comfortable vantage point from which to watch a fantastical spectacle, and the spectacle itself. Industrial symbols, despite the visual clash they create against medieval, "old" Belgium, become another form of touristic (and artistic) entertainment. Interestingly, however, as Titmarsh incorporates these elements of modernity into a wider romanticized vision, he also extends these fantastical, "demonical" metaphors to the less desirable (and aesthetically pleasing) visions of "men at the [Brussels] station", "[coming] out with flaming torches—awful-looking fellows indeed!" Another shift is at play here, one that clashes with Titmarsh's attempt to extend sublimity (and readerly interest) to all of his Belgian surroundings. Leaving the safety of the train, Titmarsh experiences the disagreeable necessity of mingling with the local population, combined with the renewed realization that he is captive to a process of mass tourism which favors profit over quality.

The satire of "Little" Belgium as an a-political arcadia and the importance of Waterloo

In *Little Travels* and in *Papers*, promises of the sublime on each side of the Channel (the Dover cliffs, the high spires of Belgian churches, the awe-inspiring factories) are met with disappointment. Titmarsh's thwarted aestheticizing reflects Thackeray's interest in exploring travel writing as a commercial literary genre and his uncertainties about the value of his Belgian material. When they consider Belgium in its contemporaneity, Thackeray's narrators adopt a condescending view of its people and institutions, finding them banal. Titmarsh repeatedly describes his Belgian environment as small in scale: Belgian towns are "little" and "neat" (303), surrounded by "little woods" (309). In Brussels, he is amused by the area housing the country's institutions:

> In the Park is a *little* theatre, a *café* somewhat ruinous, *a little palace for the king of this little kingdom*, some smart public buildings (with S. P. Q. B. emblazoned on them, at which pompous inscription one cannot help laughing[32]), and other rows of houses somewhat resembling a *little* Rue de Rivoli. Whether from my own natural greatness and magnanimity, or from that handsome share of national conceit that every Englishman possesses, my impressions of this city are certainly anything but respectful. It has *an absurd kind of Lilliput look with it*. There are soldiers, just as in Paris, better dressed, and doing a vast deal of drumming and bustle; and yet, somehow, far from being frightened at them, I feel inclined to laugh in their faces. (311, my emphasis)

Titmarsh's Belgium resembles a dollhouse, a playground where political actors look like children in a play. While himself puffed up with national superiority, Titmarsh sees "little" Belgium as absurdly self-important. His attitude stems from the nation's youth and reflects Victorian skepticism regarding its ability to take care of itself (politically and economically) and be an international role-player. Titmarsh also repeatedly compares Belgian culture unfavourably to that of other European countries. The city's "rows of houses" only "somewhat resembl[e] a little Rue de Rivoli." Ghent is "a vulgar Venice" and its "dirty canals and old houses" do not compare to those of the Netherlands (323). Visiting the Brussels Museum of Fine Arts, he observes,

> It is an absurd little gallery, absurdly imitating the Louvre, with just such compartments and pillars as you see in the noble Paris gallery; only here the

32 A reference to the latin *Senātus Populusque Rōmānus* ("The Senate and People of Rome"). The modifiable abbreviation was incorporated into coat of arms in cities throughout Belgium, as it was throughout European capitals. Titmarsh is mocking Belgium's attempt at mimicking the pomp of larger European nations, and at viewing itself as an empire.

> pillars and capitals are stucco and white in place of marble and gold, and plaster-of-paris busts of great Belgians are placed between the pillars. (313)

For Titmarsh, Belgium's pomp and respectability is a facade, its symbols of power, made of "plaster" instead of "marble or gold," are like fake props on a theater stage. Through this unfavorable, infantilizing vision, he highlights what he perceives as the immaturity of Belgium as a nation,[33] which he imagines to have little power outside of that granted to it by stronger, more influential nations.

In his Belgian sonnets, Rossetti's lyric speaker seeks distance from geopolitics to deeply reflect on Belgium's artistic past and Britain's artistic present. In *Little Travels*, Titmarsh's attempt to seek a similar distance is quickly revealed as an unconvincing narratorial cliché. His aetheticizing, romanticized visions continuously falter as elements of modern, industrial Belgium intrude into his "pictures" and, as a result, his narrative. These awkward juxtapositions undermine his narrative authority and also question his use of "little" Belgium as an idealized form of north-European Arcadia. Indeed, Thackeray's narrators at times pretend to fantasize about Belgium as a country detached from political realities:

> Think what a comfort it would be to belong to a little state like this; not to abuse their privilege, but philosophically to use it. If I were Belgian, I would not care one single fig about politics. I would not read thundering leading-articles. I would not have an opinion. What's the use of an opinion here? Happy fellows! do not

33 This political immaturity and lack of international standing have an artistic pendant. Titmarsh sharply critiques contemporary Belgian art: "Nothing can be more juvenile or paltry than the works of the native Belgians here exhibited." (314) and "Belgian artists . . . are, like all the rest of the things in this country, miserable imitations of the French school" (326).

> the French, the English, and the Prussians, spare them the trouble of thinking, and make all their opinions for them? (311)

Titmarsh's caustic remark, in which Belgians have so little influence that they would be better off not caring about politics at all, belittles the country's international role and creates the fantasy of an a-political Belgium. His humorous comment opens a reflection on political engagement. Thackeray, like Titmarsh, might seem interested in *imagining* a life without politics,[34] but he quickly cuts his reverie short:

> Think of living in a country free, easy, respectable, wealthy, and with the nuisance of talking politics removed from out of it. All this might the Belgians have, and a part do they enjoy, but not the best part; no, these people will be brawling and by the ears, and parties run as high here as at Stoke Pogis or Little Pedlington. (311)

While not undermining the observation that Belgium's political destiny depends on foreign nations ("a part do they enjoy"), and while still hinting at the relative parochial nature of their concerns, Titmarsh observes that Belgians are not as willing to forgo political interest altogether. Connected to this observation is Titmarsh's surprise at Belgium's offerings of foreign newspapers (325-326). Titmarsh is amused not only because he had speculated that Belgians should ignore international matters, but also because he realizes that French newspapers relate matters very differently from British ones. While pondering why "foreigners, in Belgium as much as in France" hate the British, he comes to an insightful realization: "As for the notion that foreigners hate us because we have beaten them so often, my dear sir, this is the greatest error in

34 Note Anne Isabella Ritchie's comment, "He rarely cared to write politics, although he never ceased to take an interest in them" (xxxii). Certainly, *Little Travels* supports the latter statement and questions the first.

the world: well-educated Frenchmen do not believe that we have beaten them" (325). Thackeray highlights here the role of subjectivity and relativity of perspective in (hi)story telling.[35] While Titmarsh's awkward attempts at describing Belgium in painterly terms reflected the effects of relativity of experience on the narratives of travel writers, passages like the one above underline the effects of relativity of history-telling on journalistic, historical and political writings. The humorous interruptions of Titmarsh's Romantic tirades by down-to-earth travelers, repeated meals or un-Gothic banalities find here an echo in the undermining of Titmarsh's fantasies of political disengagement by what the reality he observes in and around Brussels.

Connected to the questioning of Titmarsh's Arcadian reverie is the last section of *Little Travels*, which describes the narrator's coach trip to Waterloo and discussion with the conductor: "I asked the conductor if he had been at the battle; he burst out laughing like a philosopher, as he was, and said, '*Pas si bête*.'" (332-333) The fact that this auto-biographical anecdote resurfaces in *Vanity Fair* shows its thematic importance. The conductor's reaction ("*Pas si bête*"—"not that stupid") undermines Titmarsh's earlier musings by showing that not all forms of political non-intervention are rooted in complacency, laziness, or lack of intelligence, but that they might reflect an awareness of the risks at play. The conductor's physical disengagement from the battle is not a sign of intellectual disinterest but instead acute geopolitical insight: a "philosopher" in his own right, this man simply knew what fighting at Waterloo entailed.[36] Thackeray shows that true lack of political engagement is not only difficult to achieve, it is also a potentially dangerous state of being.

35 Thackeray ingeniously avoids estranging British readers fancying themselves more knowledgeable than their French counterparts ("believe").

36 The theme of non-involvement of the Belgian population, coupled with an underestimation of risks, made its way into *Vanity Fair* and, through contrast, influences the characterization of the British in Brussels, shown underestimating the dangers facing them.

A visit to Waterloo was, in the first decades that followed the battle, a touristic favorite for British travelers (Francois 74). At the time of *Little Travels*, however, its touristic pull had lost its appeal. Titmarsh nonchalantly explains, "I thought to myself . . . what fine thing it will be in after-days to say that I have been to Brussels and never seen the field of Waterloo; indeed, that I am such a philosopher as not to care a fig about the battle" (331). Titmarsh's hesitation is a show of defiance that reflects the increasingly "tired" rhetoric surrounding the event. Thackeray is poking fun at Titmarsh's attempt to pose as a rebellious traveler-writer and at his reiterated desire to become, as he half-joking imagines that Belgians should be, apolitical. Titmarsh eventually gives in, showcasing that some travel narrative clichés are just too strong to resist, but also highlighting the Romantic belief in the value of first-hand experiences.

His trip leads to surprisingly profound insight, but not one filled with nationalistic pride, as one might have expected. Unlike other parts of *Little Travels*, the Waterloo section, set in a Belgian location stripped of its national markers, stands out as dealing primarily with Britain and the British. Titmarsh writes, "I ask any gentleman who reads this … to remember especially how many times, how many hundred times, how many thousand times, in his hearing, the battle of Waterloo has been discussed after dinner, and to call to mind how cruelly he has been bored by the discussion[37]" (331). But his decision to give up on his plan to skip the visit ("this pitch of philosophy was unattainable" [332]), shows that the Waterloo "pilgrimage" was not only still perceived as a personal duty to the Nation, but also becomes an authorial "duty" to travel guide readers. Titmarsh is shown afraid of missing out if he fails to follow the path of others, further complicating his Romantic narratorial pretense.

37 Note the difference of tone in *Vanity Fair*: "All of us have read of what occurred during that interval. The tale is in every Englishman's mouth; and you and I, who were children when the great battle was won and lost, are never tired of hearing and recounting the history of that famous action."(339)

Seeing the field does not spark a tirade about the battle but, instead, a virulent attack on the social injustice in Britain's choices in whom to celebrate as heroes ("But live or die, win or lose, what do *they* get? English glory is too genteel to meddle with those humble fellows. She does not condescend to ask the names of the poor devils whom she kills in her service." [335]). Whereas Thackeray often uses Titmarsh and the Fat Contributor to question and mock the effects of mass tourism and travel guides as a superficial literary genre, the latter attack is a more pointedly political stab at these same travel guides when they choose to tackle national "accomplishments." When they do, Thackeray implies, they become part of a greater network of ideologically-loaded literary productions dealing with history and/or contemporary geopolitics. Structurally, this section of *Little Travels* might at first seem to come as an "afterthought" to the whole narrative but it in fact constitutes its climax. Through Titmarsh's heart-felt comments, Thackeray questions the validity of one form of national narrative (one focusing on the battle and victory) over another (one considering casualties from a socio-economic standpoint). But he also questions the authority and seeming objectivity of travel guides (which showcased nationalistic anecdotes about the battle) as well as the ideological reappropriation of the battle through literature, most notably via Titmarsh's critical mention of Robert Southey's Waterloo poem ("The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo") and poet laureates in general.[38]

Little Travels differs significantly from the *Irish Sketchbook* and *From Cornhill to Cairo* in that, unlike in the latter two works, where, after hightlighting British shortcomings, Thackeray avoids offering solutions or replacements, Titmarsh's experience in Belgium does suggest alternatives. Indeed, one type of narratorial idealization resists the systematic underminings of

38 Biographical anecdotes shed light on Thackeray's aversion for the theatrical, nationalistic pomp surrounding literary descriptions of the Battle. See Monsarrat, "[W]hen Lever showed himself ready to accept compliments on his recent fictional treatment of the Battle of Waterloo, Thackeray caused some hostility with his hesitant confession that it had been rather too imaginative and high-flown for his taste" (131).

romanticizing attempts described earlier in this chapter: the vision of Belgium (and Continental Europe in general) as a place where social equality is observable. I argue that the issue structurally frames *Little Travels*, which both ends and starts with conversations relating to social inequality in Britain. The apparently mundane social interactions taking place as Titmarsh takes an omnibus to Billingsgate anchor points of comparison for similar interactions in Belgium, which will in turn be used to criticize British hierarchy. Two events spur Titmarsh's meditations during the first coach trip. The first involves his travel companions, "men in pepper-and-salt undress jackets with a duke's coronet on their buttons" (298) who, after being rebuked for forcing another valet to loudly play the *Duke's March* on his kinopium, aggressively retort "Very well . . . we're only of the Duke of B-'s establishment, THAT'S ALL." (298) The scene's satire resides in the traveler's general discomfort, but also in Titmarsh's reflections:

> I felt for my part that I respected [the footmen]. They were in daily communication with a duke! They were not the rose, but they had lived beside it. There is an odor in the English aristocracy which intoxicates plebeians. I am sure that any commoner in England, though he would die rather than confess it, would have a respect for those great big hulking Duke's footmen (298).

Titmarsh's feigned admiration of course masks a caustic condemnation of these footmen, "plebeians" "intoxicate[d]" by the power of those whom they serve. Thackeray drives his point home as Titmarsh recalls another anecdote:

> The day before, her Grace the Duchess had passed us alone in a chariot-and-four with two outriders. What better mark of innate superiority could man want? Here

> was a slim lady who required four—six horses to herself, and four servants … to guard her.
>
> We were sixteen inside and out, and had consequently an eighth of a horse apiece.
>
> A duchess = 6, a commoner = 1/8; that is to say,
>
> 1 duchess = 48 commoners (298-9)

By offering such "mathematics of inequality," Thackeray simultaneously delivers satire, illustrates the disproportionate extent of inequality, and hints that social difference in Britain works as a systematic, precise process one is not expected to question. Titmarsh then proceeds,

> If I were a duchess of the present day, I would say to the duke my noble husband, "My dearest grace, I think, when I travel alone in my chariot from Hammersmith to London, I will not care for the outriders. In these days, when there is so much poverty and so much disaffection in the country, we should not *éclabousser the canaille* with the sight of our preposterous prosperity."
>
> But this is very likely only plebeian envy, and I dare say, if I were a lovely duchess of the realm, I would ride in a coach-and-six, with a coronet on the top of my bonnet and a robe of velvet and ermine even in the dog-days. (299)

After poking fun at the footmen, Titmarsh muses how, were he a noble, he would be sensitive to class differences. However, in tune with Thackeray's humorous style and questioning of narratorial authority, honest Titmarsh's imaginary resolution quickly falls flat to expose his own attraction to nobility. Titmarsh's resistance to let go of his aristocratic reverie can be taken as jest, but, even as such, it hints that British social inequality is so institutionalized that its disadvantaged actors (even the incisive Titmarsh) would not wait to use it to against their peers if they had the chance. A similar coach ride is described in *Papers*, where The Fat Contributor, torn

between "prefer[ring] having some of the third-class people for company" (70) and annoyance at lower-class riders invading his personal space, fumes against "brutes with free tickets" posing as "gentleman who pay" (71). While his reaction reflects a mental resistance to social mobility (be it real or pretended), the echoes between the two anecdotes show that *social pretense*, across social classes, is a central concern for both narrators.

The coach trip to Waterloo, once read alongside the Richmond-Bilungsgate ride, effectively helps frame the narrative. Titmarsh notes that the Belgian postilion, who freely converses with a farmer, is called by the latter "baron." He then remarks,

> I thought no doubt that this talk was one of the many jokes that my companions were in the habit of making. But not so: the postilion was an actual baron, the bearer of an ancient name, the descendant of gallant gentlemen … His father the old baron had dissipated the family fortune, and here was this young nobleman, at about five-and-forty, compelled to bestride a clattering Flemish stallion, and bump over dusty pavements at the rate of five miles an hour. But see the beauty of high blood: with what a calm grace the man of family accommodates himself to fortune. Far from being cast down, his lordship met his fate like a man: he swore and laughed the whole of the journey, and as we changed horses, condescended to partake of half a pint of Louvain beer, to which the farmer treated him... (335)

The contrast between the humble Belgian baron riding with Titmarsh and the earlier footmen or the duchess could not be sharper. And while Titmarsh seems to turn his surprise into another form of admiration for the higher classes ("see the beauty of high blood"), it is clear—particularly in light of Titmarsh's upcoming anger after visiting Waterloo—that he perceives this form of Continental nobility in a more positive light than what he observes in Britain. The

baron's worth, in Titmarsh's eyes, is to be judged by the content of his character, not his title.[39] Thackeray, preparing the ground for Titmarsh's reflections on the social unfairness of war, show him pondering about how differently British and Belgian nobility behave towards lower classes:

> In our free country [England] a tradesman, a lackey, or a waiter will submit to almost any given insult from a gentleman; in these benighted lands [Belgium] *one man is a good as another; and pray God it may soon be so with us*! Of all European people, which is the nation that has the most haughtiness, the strongest prejudices, the greatest reserve, the greatest dulness? I say an Englishman of the genteel classes." (324-325, my emphasis)

During his Waterloo trip, Titmarsh comes to a double realization: he understands, through his experience with the Belgian coachman, that political disengagement is impossible and not enviable, and he also realizes how much more fluid Continental social structures are compared to Britain's. As Thackeray uses Belgium as a non-British space from which to spark conversations on matters of British politics, he then presents the former as an enviable replacement ("pray God it may soon be with us!"). Thus, after letting Titmarsh yield to the "pull" of Waterloon as an expected tourist attraction imbued with nationalistic importance and letting him follow the paths of other travelers before him, Thackeray has him undergo a radical narratorial reversal. Eventually, Thackeray refuses to let Titmarsh, like many narrators before him, attempt to

39 This passage finds an echo in *Papers*:

> Lord Muffington was on board, and of course I got into conversation with his lordship—a noble-looking person. But just when I thought he might be on the point of asking me to Muffington Castle, he got up suddenly, and said 'Yes, my lord,' to a fellow I never should have suspected of a coronet. Yet he was the noble earl, and my friend was but his his flunkey. Such is life! And so may its most astute observers be sometimes deceived (75-6).

The episode highlights the constructed nature of social difference: to the Fat Contributor, servant and master act and look interchangeably. However, because Thackeray aims to undermine narratorial credibility, the narrator's mistake may also be attributed to his own inadequacy: the narrator is just not he "astute observer(...)" he pretends to be. In this passage, social mobility is projected, but not actually happening: the *apparent* interchangeability involves a lower-class character appearing (or pretending to be), like the "brutes with free tickets," a member of a higher-class, not the other way around.

"commercialize" his sight of the famous battlefield—as had been his (often awkwardly ineffective) tendency throughout *Little Travels* with other sights. Instead of placing his narrator in the stereotypical position of the British visitor blindly proud of his country, Thackeray makes him come to a higher form of insight which sheds an even brighter light on the questionable role of literature (encompassing other travel guides (be they modern or Romantic) or the work of poet laureates like Southey) in shaping national ideologies, as well as on the need for greater unity across social classes in Britain.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHALLENGES OF CROSS-CHANNEL MULTICULTURAL LOVE: CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S USE OF BELGIAN HISTORY IN *THE PROFESSOR* (1846-1857) AND *VILLETTE* (1853)

Charlotte Brontë's exposure to Belgium and Belgian history

On March 6, 1843, Charlotte Brontë, teaching in Brussels at Mr. Heger's *pensionnat*, writes to her friend Ellen Nussey: "I now regularly give English lessons to Mr. Heger … [he] already begins to speak English very decently—if you could see and hear the efforts I make to teach [him] to pronounce like Englishmen and [his] unavailing attempts to imitate, you would laugh to all eternity" (Smith 311). This anecdote from Charlotte's stay with Heger, the object of her unrequited love and the inspiration for M. Paul in *Villette* (1853), offers an intimate peek at their relationship and a surprising contrast to the better-known case of Heger's harsh, paternalistic supervision of her French homework. As the quotation illustrates, transcultural exchange—here in the form of foreign language acquisition—was mutually playful. In the first part of this chapter, I connect this real-life observation to an analysis of Lucy Snowe, *Villette*'s British expatriate in the Belgium-inspired Labassecour, and of M. Paul, headmaster of the fictional Labassecourian/Belgian school where Lucy works[40] and argue that, by expanding the focus to *Villette*'s Continental characters and exploring the significance of Belgian history as background for the novel (in particular the Belgian revolution and the British response to it), we

40 Readers should remain aware that *Villette*'s backdrop, the country of Labassecour and its small city of Villette, are simultaneously heavily inspired by Brontë's experience in Belgium and Brussels, but also never explicitly compared to the real-life country and city by the author, and they are thus still to be understood as fictional locations.

can better understand not only M. Paul's response to the (British) other, but also Brontë's stance on cross-channel relations. I follow with a comparison between *Villette* and Brontë's earlier novel, *The Professor*, written in 1846 but published a decade later. Brontë's changing attitudes towards cross-channel relations, I argue, are reflected not only in the two novels' differentiated approach to multilingualism but also the author's move from an openly Belgian setting (in *The Professor*) to a setting which, while recognizably Belgian, becomes fictionalized as the Kingdom of Labassecour.

As Heather Glen has shown, most pre-1960's criticism on Brontë tends to be oddly ahistorical because of her novels' focus on private experience. This approach was later challenged by new historicist and feminist scholars who recognized Brontë's works "more confidently … as responses to a 'history' whose essential questions and contours are assumed to be well known" and her characters as "much more aware of and responsive to a multifarious and changing early nineteenth-century world [than is usually recognized]" (*Charlotte Brontë*, 2). Anne Longmuir stressed the importance of such historical awareness by connecting the choice of *Villette*'s locus—a fictional, yet recognizable Belgium—to the history of Anglo-Belgian political relations. She argued that "[the] failure to consider Belgium's cultural role is … symptomatic of a recent tendency in literary criticism to overlook Britain's interactions with Continental Europe, in favor of its relationship with empire," and that "Victorian attitudes toward Belgium have key implications for our understanding of the conception of Britishness in Brontë's fiction" ("Reader" 164). Longmuir's awareness of the limitations of describing Lucy's Continental environment as simply "not England" (163) and "not … merely a product of Brontë's own personal experience on the continent" (187) is a constructive step towards placing Brontë's novels more firmly in the context of nineteenth century cross-channel relations. This chapter

goes further in investigating how such analysis of the connections between *Villette*'s plot and Continental Europe's history benefits from engagement with a precise account of early Belgian history.

At the crux of Longmuir's analysis lies the peculiar location of Belgium as a meeting point between French and British cultures. Belgium, she tells us, as an "overlooked middle-ground," "epitomizes the conflict between British and French values in Brontë's fiction—and the possibility of their reconciliation" (167), a conflict crystallizing around the Battle of Waterloo, which *Villette* would metaphorically stage. Richard Bonfiglio, in his insightful reading of *Villette* underlining Belgium's unique place in nineteenth century European history, defines Brussels primarily as a space playing a "crucial role … in opening up a cultural conversation between England and France" and in helping Brontë imagine "a new sense of Anglo-French" space (602). While the impact of Waterloo on British discourses about Belgium is evident and while France's culture undeniably influenced that of its neighbor, it is problematic to define Belgium primarily as a meeting point or fictional synthesis of other nations and cultures. To envision nineteenth-century discourses about "Belgian space" only as "integral to the formation of British identity" and of Belgium "as potentially British" (Longmuir 170) is to reinforce a colonialist understanding of Belgium: the country, presented as a blank space, is taken out of its own historical and cultural context. Brontë, as I will show, had multiple opportunities to experience Belgian culture, which must in turn inflect our understanding of some of the novel's inter-personal dynamics.

Brontë's interest in Waterloo, Napoleon, and the Duke of Wellington, is well-known; moreover, what we know of her stay in Brussels makes it reasonable to speculate that she knew the history of the Belgian Revolution of 1830, the event that precipitated the country's

independence from the Kingdom of the Netherlands and that was still fresh in the memories of Belgians in 1842. While Brontë was only 14 when the Belgian Revolution broke out, given what we know about the family's newspaper reading[41] and their influence on the siblings' imaginary world of Angria, including its characters and many insurrections, it is likely that she learned of the event in her teenage years. Patrick Brontë's interest in Irish emancipation—a topic regularly analyzed in light of the religious conflicts taking place in Belgium—meant that news concerning Belgium's unrest likely found its way to the Brontë household.[42]

Brontë's interest in a more contemporary understanding of Belgium is apparent in her decision *not* to accompany her father during his trip to the Waterloo battlefield in the first days after her arrival in Brussels in 1842. As previously discussed, visiting the latter, because it symbolized English sacrifice and heroism, was normally "the apogee of [the] often self-aggrandizing journey [of all British tourists]" (Demoor 3). Elizabeth Gaskell's biography shows that Brontë was not the recluse some scholars have thought her to be, as exemplified by her repeated trips "beyond the barriers of Brussels" (218), her pencil sketches of Brussels' surrounding areas,[43] and her participation in educational "trips into the town" organized by Heger for his pupils (230). More poignantly, her loneliness in the Summer of 1843 spurred her to explore the city and, just like Lucy, to "travers[e] the Boulevards and the streets … for hours together" (240-241), exposing her to the city's landmarks and architectural details which she later vividly recalled in both *Villette* and *The Professor*. The location of the Heger *pensionnat* in a city

41 In particular of *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Leeds Mercur*y. For more on the Brontë family's access to printed news and their influence on the Brontë sisters' early literary imagination, see Chapter 6 of Barker, *The Brontës*. As an adult writer, Charlotte Brontë was in the habit of consulting these newspapers to research her topics (see Glen, "*Shirley* and *Villette*")

42 See Barker, 182-183. In her early teens, Charlotte would regularly listen to her father "read from the Tory newspapers about the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829)" and he shared his enthusiasm about politics with his daughter (Alexander 143).

43 See her pencil drawings of local landscape made during her Belgian stay (Lonoff 47, Alexander and Sellars 258-263).

in which "[e]very spot told an historic tale" (Gaskell 200) meant that Brontë was surrounded daily by monuments connected with the Belgian revolution.[44] Gaskell's biography and Brontë's letters refer to people who likely exposed her to Belgian history. For many scholars, Lucy's description of the Belgian King Leopold as “a man of fifty, a little bowed, a little gray … a nervous, melancholy man” (247) projects the author’s own lack of interest. This downplays her acquaintance with people like the British consul in Brussels (who served as the private chaplain to King Leopold [Smith 268-269]), or with Mrs. Taylor, Princess Louise's reader (Gaskell 198), whose granddaughters took Brontë on historical tours of the city. Given the Taylors' erudition, their connection to the Orleans family, and the historical significance of the places they visited, it is hard to imagine Brontë not being introduced to both old and recent local history. Moreover, at the Chapelle Royale, where Belgium’s Protestant king also attended services, Charlotte would likely have heard allusions to the revolution.[45] Last but not least, Heger himself, who taught history at a Brussels college just before Brontë's arrival, likely spoke of the revolution with his pupil since historical learning was clearly advertised on the prospectus for the *pensionnat* and was a recurrent topic of Charlotte's devoirs.[46] Heger had been personally involved in the

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44 Examples abound. Gaskell notes how the “Cathedral of St. Gudule, the religious paintings, the striking forms and ceremonies of the Romish Church—all made a deep impression on the girls” (200). That Charlotte and Emily visited the Cathedral's famous, newly-built mausoleum dedicated to the victims of the Belgian revolution is more than likely. In one of her German “devoirs,” Charlotte mentions a picnic alongside the Canal de Willebroek, a waterway which played a key role in establishing Belgian's economic independence after the Revolution. Closer to “Old Brussels,” Gaskell points out that the “Rue d'Isabelle,” which housed the *pensionnat*, was overlooked by the commemorative statue of the General Beliard (201), responsible for sending French troops against the Dutch when the latter tried to regain control of Brussels in 1830.

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46 See *The Brussels Brontë Group,* “The Hegers,” for more on the topic. Also see Chadwick for a copy of the school's prospectus. It is difficult to ascertain that Heger taught these classes at the *pensionnat*. However, the fact that he taught Belgian history at the Veterinary College, makes it likely that he participated in some History classes taught by others (as we know he did for other subjects). In *Villette*, Lucy mentions “Madame Panache—a lady

revolutionary unrest. It is easy to imagine that a paternalistic, scholarly, and somewhat self-aggrandizing man who, "on a visit to Brussels in 1829 … found himself in the middle of the Belgian Revolution" and "went off to find some gunpowder and fought the Dutch in the Parc de Bruxelles" (De Vries 92), would have made it a topic of conversation with his British student over the two years Brontë resided there.[47]

Moving beyond issues of British national identity formation

The interest in cosmopolitanism as an alternative to nation-centric views of literature and culture, has led scholars to consider how Brontë's "Belgian novels" contribute to the topic. These critics have offered valuable insight into the relationship between Lucy's private experiences in Labassecour and her difficulties defining her national identity.[48] Amanda Anderson, in a reading of *Villette*, associates the novel's engagement in cosmopolitanism specifically with an "explorat[ion of] multiple forms of detachment" (47). Lucy, Anderson posits, approaches the Continental Other while "persistently seek[ing] to mute her own affect and sustain a stoic tranquility and calm" (48), an observation that seems to clash with the character's internal turmoil and external outbursts and, as Anderson herself points out, Lucy's increased "difficulty"

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temporarily employed … to give lessons in history" (and whose teaching M. Paul repeatedly disrupts with his own stories, as he "intrude[s] on her class" [405]). Many of Charlotte's French essays and "dictées" showcased topics related to history.

47 Brontë knew more of Belgian history than her character Lucy who, in *Villette*, only vaguely mentions that, "In past days there had been, said history, an awful crisis in the fate of Labassecour, involving I know not what peril to the rights and liberties of her gallant citizens. Rumours of war, there had been, if not wars themselves, a kind of struggling in the streets—a bustle—a running to and fro, some rearing of barricades, some burgher-rioting, some calling out of troops, much interchange of brick-bats, and even a little of shot. Tradition held that patriots had fallen: in the old Basse-Ville was shown an enclosure, solemnly built in and set apart, holding, it was said, the sacred bones of the martyrs" (525). The awkwardness of this description (arguably also connectable to Lucy's drugged state at this point of the narrative), its lack of precision (note the repetition of "some"), mixed with the use of rather specific terms connected to the actual Belgian revolution ("burgher," "barricades", "brick-bats") point less to a lack of knowledge on the part of Brontë than a wish to avoid incorporating into the narrative a dimension of local history that would complicate her reader's understanding of the important internal changes occurring in Lucy at this point of the story.

48 For example, Amanda Anderson, Longmuir, Marutollo and, more recently, Bonfiglio.

affirming “English ideals, especially when they are considered in isolation from the Continental practices they oppose” (51-52). In contrast to Anderson, my analysis of *Villette*, conceives cosmopolitanism as an alternative to “multiculturalism” in reflecting an openness to other cultures that goes beyond initial “detachment” to denote a willingness to truly sympathize with the position of the cultural/religious Other while refusing to see one's position as superior and, therefore, to continue to respect differences—a more fitting description of Lucy's (and M. Paul's) mental and emotional processes at play in *Villette*, as I will show later in this chapter.[49]

In a more conventionally nation-focused analysis, Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky take up Benedict Anderson's concept of “imagined communities” to explore *Villette*'s take on national identities; “Lucy's complicated relationship with the real England,” they suggest, “can be read as a meditation on the modes by which nations are imagined and on the ways in which the individual is confined or is liberated by an interpellation into a specific imagined national identification” (926). As Longmuir points out, Belgium and Britain were both parliamentary monarchies striving “to unify several different cultures within each national identity.” Moreover, the similarities between the two countries,

> … promoted the perception in Britain that Belgium was a space with colonial potential, a perception that is repeatedly reiterated in *The Professor* and *Villette*. … By subjecting the Belgian spaces in her fiction to such colonizing strategies, Brontë reinforces the perception, then dominant in Britain, that Belgium was peculiarly susceptible to British cultural influence. (Longmuir, “Reader,” 178)

49 My use of “cosmopolitanism” acknowledges and espouses that used by Wong in his “postsecular cosmopolitan critique” of Brontë's novel (1), particularly his desire “to correct the tendency of secularist readings to overlook the ways in which religion can, and has, served in some historical contexts to promote cosmopolitanism” and his belief that, “instead of representing instances of detachment or opportunities to reaffirm her Englishness, Lucy's religious encounters … embody the possibilities of engagement and transnational connection” (9).

On this view, Belgium became both a "very small miniature of Paris" (Bell 371) and "a little England"(381),[50] a form of sibling nation which, the British believed, needed their help to grow into its full potential and which they were consequently eager to "mold … in England's own image" (Bonfiglio 604). Because of both these similarities and this potential for change, Longmuir argues,

> Brontë's British characters experience a … moment of self-conscious identification with their national identity in Belgium. In other words, much as Belgium will offer a refracted reflection of Britain's own colonial enterprises in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), so Belgium represents a space in *The Professor* and *Villette* in which Brontë's characters can reimagine Britishness. (187)

Though it is sensible to read Lucy's story as a series of personal crises through which she struggles to "reimagine Britishness" while coming to terms with her own national identity, this approach ignores the fact that Villette's inhabitants, the citizenry of a Belgian-like revolutionary aftermath, are engaged in national dilemmas of their own. It is worth exploring how Brontë considered transchannel national identification as a *two-way* street, much like the process of linguistic exchange she described in her letter to Ellen Nussey. M. Paul's concerns for protecting national identity are rooted in his participation in Villette's revolutionary struggles and find expression in occasional outbursts against Britain (such as during the *fête* celebrating him [395-396]). Madame Beck and her Continental students are also disturbed by Lucy's Britishness. Their efforts to cling to Roman Catholic culture are crystallized in the daily routine of the "*lectures pieuses*" (133), which the very un-open-minded Madame Beck attempts to force upon Lucy and which the latter sees as a direct affront against her Protestantism.

50 For more on the subject of such Paris/London comparisons, see Bonfliglio, 603.

To imagine Lucy, as Longmuir does, as potentially representing a British fantasy of culturally "colonizing" Belgium is problematic. Longmuir points out that Lucy, as a spinster, is "literally unwelcome in England [and] never depicted at home" there ("Reader" 7-8). Emotionally vulnerable Lucy is an unlikely enforcer of Britain's "colonizing strategies." When she lands on the Continent, she seems as much "a blank surface on to which private fantasies may be feverishly projected" as the fantasized Belgium that Terry Eagleton described in those terms (67). In fact, the fresh-off-the-boat Lucy and the newly-created Belgium share uncertainties as to how to define their national identity. Just as Lucy struggles to reconcile her fidelity to Britain with an interest in the French language and Continental culture, so Belgium, emerging from a series of foreign occupiers and influences, strives to create a coherent identity while torn between French, British, Dutch, Southern, and German cultural models. The turn to France was rooted in France's military involvement against the Dutch during and after the Belgian Revolution. French was also at that time Belgium's only official language. Britain, after supporting Prince William, fostered a positive diplomatic stance towards Belgium, a rapidly industrializing nation across the channel, and vowed to protect its neutrality through the 1839 Treaty of London. Meanwhile, the Flemish-speaking Belgians, though segregated, constituted the majority of the new country's population and were influenced by the Dutch with whom they shared their language. However, the contribution of Dutch (Protestant) surveillance of Roman Catholic schools to the escalation of revolutionary unrest in 1832, made this association difficult and imbued with mistrust—factors, I will show, that affects the Labassecourian/"Belgian" characters' perception of Protestant Lucy. The "Southern" attraction to Spain and Italy was rooted in the two-century-long occupation by the Spanish Netherlands, which left a cultural mark on Brussels, and reinforced by the Italian origins of the Belgian Queen, Louise-Marie.

Meanwhile, King Leopold was Prince of Saxe-Coburg, which explains the country's friendly stance towards the Duchy within the German Confederation. The economic ties between Belgium and cities across the Rhine and in the Ruhr region were significant. While under these diverse influences, a somewhat blurry "Belgian" identity started to develop, based both on romanticized myths about the country's historic foundations (rooted in the settlements of Gallic tribes, the Belgians, famously described by Julius Caesar in his *Bellum Gallicum*) and the fresh, shared history of their revolutionary struggles against the Dutch. Thus, the Belgium that Charlotte Brontë knew and which inflected her fictional Labassecour was experimenting with newly-found freedom while finding attraction to varied cultural influences—just like Lucy.

In *Villette,* the shared anxiety of national uncertainty that Lucy shares with Labassecourians like M. Paul or Madame Beck shows up in mutual surveillance. Criticism of the novel used to limit this motif to local behavior. Lucy does, indeed, experience Madame Beck's and M. Paul's nosiness as a "Continental" oddity ("All this was very un-English: truly I was in a foreign land" [78]). However, Lucy shares this surveying attitude. Both in England and in Villette, she is a master eavesdropper.[51] Brontë's novel implies that, despite Lucy's claims to the contrary, such uninvited scrutiny is not a Gallic specialty. Surveillance and its corollaries, suspicion and curiosity, mark the beginning of Lucy's relationship with M. Paul when, after she applies for a teaching job, he is called on to use his physiognomic skills, and scrutinizes the British visitor. However, Lucy herself also constantly "measure[s] [the local students'] stature and calculate[s] [their] strength" when interacting with them (90). These behaviors, I argue, have more to do with mistrust or curious observation, which, though grounded in fear of the cultural

51 In Britain, for instance, Lucy admits "listening awhile in the darkness" (9) while little Polly weeps over the departure of her father, spying on a conversation between Mr Home and his daughter (22), and paying close, discreet attention to Polly's interactions with Graham (24-25). In Labassecour,, this spying attitude does not cease, as illustrated by her eavesdropping on Rosine or on the Brettons and De Bassompierres during the city's "fête."

other, is a necessary first step towards a recognition of differences and their reconciliation. Lucy is not the mere victim of Continental nosiness, she is part of a cultural experiment set up by Brontë's novel, an experiment in which each party, in a mutually reinforcing way, observes the other in an attempt to define not only the other's limits, but also its own.

For Lucy, possible models of British response to the Continental other include that of Graham, Polly and Ginevra, all of whom have spent time on both sides of the Channel. When she meets Ginevra on a boat heading to the Continent, Lucy has just left London, a city about which she feels divided. Her sense of homelessness is uncanny: London both attracts and repels her, in a way that parallels her equivocal feelings about how much she "fits" in Britain as a whole and, later, within the Villette community. Brontë contrasts Lucy's excitement to Ginevra's *blasée* attitude towards these trips across the Channel. Ginevra is a striking example of assimilation of British and Continental cultures, as illustrated by her advanced bilingualism. She is not only fluent in French, but feels that she can sometimes express her emotions more adequately in French than in English,[52] and declares that she now "write[s] English badly" (60).[53] She easily blends with the upper-class Labassecourian girls[54] and admits that she has "quite forgotten [her] religion: they call [her] a Protestant [but she is] not sure whether [she is] one or not" and she "do[es]n't well know the difference between Romanism and Protestantism" (60). Lucy (and Brontë through her) rejects Ginevra's multiculturalism because it is uncritical and superficial:

52 See: "'Mais pas du tout!' (she always had recourse to French when about to say something particularly heartless and perverse). 'Je suis sa reine, mais il n'est pas mon roi'" (102). Her question to Lucy, "You can play, sing, speak three or four languages?" (61) implies that her own linguistic skills might not be limited to bilingualism.
53 Commenting on her use of the French word "*chose*," Lucy observes that Ginevra uses it as "the convenient substitute for any missing word in any language she might chance at the time to be speaking. French girls often do the like; from them she had caught the custom" (60). Illustrated here is Ginevra's apparent assimilation, through language, into the society of the Labassecour students. Ironically, however, "chose" does not actually provide her with a more accurate word for a term without equivalence in English (unlike some of the foreign words M. Paul or William use), it is a filler, an empty word that does not showcase a constructive use of multilingualism, but is instead to be understood as a way to escape the necessity of precision.
54 It is quickly revealed, however, that her close acquaintances are primarily British: "The natives, you know, are intensely stupid and vulgar; but there are some nice English families" (60).

Ginevra embraces the local culture, not by conscious choice based on personal beliefs, but through passive mimicry. Her comments on religion (which find an echo in those of Harriet Brandt in Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*) likely shocked Victorian readers not only because they hint at a dangerous blurring of boundaries between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but also because they reveal Ginevra as a young woman who, unlike Lucy, is unwilling to critically reflect on her own religious falterings.

Ginevra and her cousin Polly, however different they might at first appear, share a certain passivity. Lucy, describing the young Polly, notes that she "had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another," (26) and sarcastically notes her great aptitude at imitation (30). In Labassecour, Polly's passivity lies in an uncritical rejection. When Lucy meets her in Villette, Polly does not seem interested in mixing with the locals, and instead develops an attachment to Graham, a disturbing model of British "monoculturalism" abroad. Despite his knowledge of French and his work at the *pensionnat*, Graham is immediately recognized as an Englishman by Lucy the first time she sees him on the Continent. He and his mother attempt to create in Villette a form of "miniature England" or, as John Plotz puts it in his study of the culture of British global colonialism, a portable homeland in the form of "portable property." Indeed, the various objects the two characters have imported to Villette might at first seem to show that

> The flow of objects outward from England played a crucial role in exporting a restrictive, distinctive sort of Englishness through a world that stayed distinctively non-English … These pieces of property are meaningful … because they do not civilize, instead, they embody English culture, in its most particularist and nonteleological sense. (Plotz 20-21)

In the town of Villette, however, Lucy's experience of "cultural portability" (21) is imbued with uncanniness, as shown in her confusion when, after fainting on the streets, she wakes up in Mrs. Breton's Continental residence ("Where was I? … Had a Genius … borne me over land and ocean, and laid me quietly down beside a hearth of Old England?" [194]). The irony of the passage is that the objects around her have a non-"decaying" quality that looks increasingly surreal and spectral to her.[55] Lucy is not really surrounded by England, but by a ghostly, fantasized version of it.[56] For Graham, since Englishness is a transportable commodity, there is no need to question one's national identity abroad and Villette to him becomes no more than a "little Britain." It is the inability to change or the willingness only to passively mimic which differentiates *Villette*'s other British characters from Lucy and M. Paul. None of them develops a capacity to relate to the Continental other, whereas Lucy's professional and sentimental life is set in motion by M. Paul, who himself undergoes a "metamorphosis" in his contact with his British guest (371).

What eventually becomes a cross-cultural romance between Lucy and M. Paul, however, is at first rooted in conflict. From the beginning of her stay on the continent, the locals view Lucy as an austere Protestant, while she perceives her Roman Catholic acquaintances' behavior as fundamentally wrong, a judgment that precipitates her initial isolation. Mistrust of Roman Catholicism is of course a common trait of many Victorian narratives dealing with cultural differences in Continental Europe, and it naturally colors British perception of Belgium. The

55 A spectrality, grounded in artificiality, which in turn is reflected onto the feeble Lucy: "In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face" (192).

56 It is worth noting that Plotz, himself referring to the work of Ian Baucom and *Out of Place* (1999), theorized the notion of cultural portability in the context of Britons traveling throughout the British Empire, and in particular India. The fact that, in *Villette*, Lucy experiences at first the vision of Graham and his mother's English interior as authentic, but then quickly switches to experiencing it as a spectral illusion echoes the novel's resistance to let its theme of transnational engagement be read through a simple colonization model of study. While Graham and his mother find comfort in this illusion, Lucy does not.

British response to the Belgian revolution of 1832 had been especially affected by the contemporaneous Irish Question, which the Brontë family followed closely.[57] In Britain, Belgian independence and its repercussions inflected numerous political debates. First, it created a geopolitical vacuum in the heart of Europe which, the British suspected, the French would be eager to fill. Second, both advocates and detractors of Irish independence recognized the similarities between Irish demands and those of the Belgian Catholics who had successfully ended Protestant political interference.[58] Far from abating, comparisons between Ireland and Belgium continued years after Belgium's independence and were revived during the Irish emigration to England during the 1845 potato famine. Lucy's initial suspicion towards Roman Catholic Labassecourian characters and their "Popish" practices is not altogether surprising and thus seems at first to follow a tradition of writings reflecting anti-Catholic sentiments in Britain.

What makes *Villette* stand out from these other writings, however, is that Lucy's situation becomes a lot more complicated—in terms of defining her religious and national identity—when she begrudgingly admits *some* attraction to Roman Catholicism later in the novel, not only in the form of "lapses," as in her feverish call for help to Père Silas, but also in her burgeoning love for M. Paul. What makes *Villette* also different, I contend, is Brontë's interest in describing not one, but two metamorphoses side by side, that of Lucy *and* M. Paul. While internal tensions undeniably influence Lucy's construction of her identity abroad and her relationship to

57 As shown by her father's letter to the *Leeds Intelligencer* (See Barker, 503-504).

58 In fact, François shows, "This tendency to compare Ireland and Belgium" extended "back to 1815, when a Catholic region was incorporated into a clearly Protestant state," and Belgium provided an example "for both the supporters and the opponents of the Union" (47). This led to publications debating the success of the Belgian enterprise and applying the diverse conclusions to local political interests (see, for example, Fairplay and O'Dwyer). These debates were reflected in the literary realm. Charles Frederick Hennigsen, in his notes following his long poem "Scenes from the Belgian Revolution" (1832), denigrates the new Belgium, refuses to talk of "revolution," preferring the terms "riots of the mob" and hints that, sometimes, "there is a moral weakness, in some countries, that prevents them from standing alone" (68), a comment clearly also directed at Ireland. Conversely, in the long poem "Three Weeks in Belgium" (1849), an anonymous Irish nationalist reflects on Belgium's revolutionary history as a backdrop for vitriolic attacks against British policies in Ireland.

"Britishness," taking a closer look at the other side of this narrative of resistance and analyzing its significance for Labassecourian characters like Madame Beck and, in particular, M. Paul, is illuminating. Central to understanding their strong reactions to Lucy's Protestantism is the Dutch occupation before Belgian independence, more specifically matters dealing with linguistic and educational policies. Under the Dutch, schools in the Southern (Belgian) provinces had been subjected to two constraining rules. The first established Dutch as the Kingdom's only official language.[59] The second gave the state full authority in the field of education. The state-run system meant that the Protestant King had the last word in the management and programs of all Belgian (predominantly Catholic) schools. Thus, prior to 1830, visits of Protestant inspectors in places like the Heger *pensionnat* were common, an interference that both Belgian Catholics and Liberals found increasingly unacceptable. The centrality of religion and education in the revolutionary claims lends important context to the animosity Labassecourian educators feel towards Lucy. Her interference in their Catholic teaching philosophy is all too reminiscent of a time they fought to end. The constant surveillance of both M. Paul and Madame Beck mentioned above cannot be dissociated from the historical Belgian fears, after only a few years of independence from the Dutch, of seeing their religious identity again being questioned, and of becoming if not militarily, at least religiously and culturally "recolonized." Knowledge of such historical background helps refine our understanding of the theme of double surveillance in the novel, as it provides a legitimate context for what could otherwise be read as a mere reinforcement of an anti-Catholic cliché (Continental Roman Catholic culture as intrinsically nosy). While one interpretation does not exclude the other, it is important to realize that,

59 The limitations on the French language echoed the Dutch King's belief that using French was a symbol of political dissent (for more on the subject, see Rooney 7, 18).

historically, the surveillance described in *Villette* was embedded in the Belgian experience of Dutch surveillance.

However, *Villette* shows that insecurities need not always translate into the kind of rejection ultimately embodied by Madame Beck, and the novel deals as much with Lucy's progressive entry into a local Roman Catholic culture and with her redefining her "Britishness" in open-minded dialogue with M. Paul as embodiment of a different Catholic counterpart. As citizens of a young nation, the real-life Belgians Charlotte met were undergoing a slow-burning process of cultural formation. Because Dutch interference in local affairs precipitated the revolution, that resistance came to be connected with a somewhat romanticized style of Belgian identity. To welcome the Protestant other and forbear from attacking the English could challenge the very notion of what seemed to constitute "Belgianness." While many of the novel's characters, like Madame Beck, prove unwilling to open up to Lucy, M. Paul overcomes such prejudices. By doing so, he triggers a process comparable to that bearing on Lucy's Britishness. He is ready to reimagine local identity (modelled on a form of "Belgianness") in a way that brackets out intolerant myths of nation-building in favor of a more personal and, as hinted earlier, trans/multicultural definition of identity.

To be sure, after initial distrust, M. Paul and Lucy enter a phase in which, sensing a potential for change in each other, they seek a simple solution in conversion. In *The Professor*, William Crimsworth, implies that a switch to Protestantism is the only sensible option in the event he and Zoraïde Reuter marry.[60] However, *Villette* intimates that conversion would not be a constructive way to address difference and would not do justice to the complex and very

60 Consider, for example, William's ponderings, soon after their first meeting: "She has been brought up a Catholic: had she been born an Englishwoman, and reared a Protestant, might she not have added straight integrity to all her other excellences? Supposing she were to marry an English and Protestant husband, would she not, rational, sensible as she is, quickly acknowledge the superiority of right over expediency, honesty over policy?" (91)

personal processes of national and religious identity. For one, conversion would sanction the victory of one colonialist impulse over another: either Lucy converts to Catholicism and becomes, in effect, the colonized subject of her future husband, or M. Paul converts to Protestantism and symbolizes a Labassecour/Belgium yielding again to foreign pressures, as the latter did after the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. Instead of encouraging this power dynamic, the novel envisions their relationship as overpassing the diplomatic status-quo through cross-channel multiculturalism.[61] As Dan Wong aptly points out, *Villette*, while describing conflicts that stem from religious differences, does not insist that such differences "necessarily preclude cosmopolitan engagement; in fact, they can aid it" (16). As such, *Villette* "portrays religious belief as the means by which the possibility of an inter-national community might be imagined, even as it reinforces the influence that religion held as an obstacle to such community in the minds of many Victorian readers" (15). Unlike the burgeoning love between William and Zoraïde in the *The Professor*, in *Villette*, transcultural love supports religious tolerance. M. Paul's last words in the novel crystalize this idea: "Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you" (572).

For Lucy and M. Paul, the awareness of this shared experience of multiculturalism blossoms when they are confronted with the sight of the "ghostly nun," a Gothic-inspired phenomenon that neither Protestantism nor Catholicism accounts for and which is a narrative device that triggers a letting down of defenses.[62] From that moment on, Lucy and M. Paul

61 From the beginning, M. Paul can be interpreted as "inherently" susceptible to multiculturalism through Lucy' hint of his "Spanish blood" (371). This allusion goes much further than a simple metaphor for a Southernized "heated" form of anger. Since, historically, what became Belgium was, from the mid 1500's to the beginning of the 18th century, a Spanish property, it is possible that M. Paul might have, indeed, Spanish blood.

62 This trick, used by Mr. de Hamal and Ginevra to sustain their amorous relationship, thus itself triggers that of Lucy and M. Paul. For more on Gothic influences on Brontë's novel, see Wein and Crosby.

abandon the conversion model when approaching the religious and cultural other and start envisioning it instead as both different and alike:

> At ease with him, I could defend my creed and faith in my own fashion; in some degree I could lull his prejudices. He was not satisfied when he went away, hardly was he appeased; but he was made thoroughly to feel that Protestants were not necessarily the irreverent Pagans his director had insinuated; he was made to comprehend something of their mode of honouring the Light, the Life, the Word; he was enabled partly to perceive that, while their veneration for things venerable was not quite like that cultivated in his Church, it had its own, perhaps, deeper power—its own more solemn awe.(485-486)

One might think that this newly-found open-mindedness affects M. Paul more than Lucy, who had already shown a weakness for Catholicism when she entered Père Silas' church in search of solace. However, as much as M. Paul appeared to despise Lucy's Protestantism at first, the descriptions of his attitude were colored by the narrating Lucy who “clung to Protestantism” (489) as a defense against perceived threats to her British identity. After mutually confessing their vision of the nun, Mr Paul exclaims,

> I knew it, somehow; before you told me. I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike—there is affinity between us. … [T]hese 'impressions,' as you say, with English caution. I, too, have had my 'impressions.' (425-426)

The insight gained by Lucy and M. Paul in their experience of the ghostly nun is that differences need not lead to incompatibility. To describe their common experience, M. Paul speaks in English. As an embodiment of a post-revolutionary nation in search of its identity, he realizes he can use the Other's language to express sentiments that go beyond national boundaries, without fear of damaging his own cultural identity. Just as Lucy finds peace of mind in embracing the Catholic M. Paul as a fiancé while not renouncing her creed, so M. Paul embraces cultural diversity without renouncing local specificities and, Brontë indirectly implies, so could Belgium as a whole. This motif of mutual reinforcement might in fact be understood as an *integral* component of an emergent Belgian identity and sheds light on Brontë's more mature understanding of national identity and crosschannel relations. This increased maturity becomes particularly visible in the juxtaposition of the author's take on multiculturalism in *Villette* with its earlier study in *The Professor*: where there was once detachment, now there is intellectual and emotional curiosity and self-questioning.

Multilingualism in *The Professor* and in *Villette*

The Professor, written only a few years after Brontë's Belgian stay, has regularly been described as a "blueprint" for *Villette*.[63] Both works feature a faithful reconstruction of the Heger *pensionnat*, an amorous relationship between teacher and student, the acclimatization to a foreign environment, and religious tensions. In addition, William and Lucy both describe their stay in London before departing for Belgium/Labassecour, the scrutiny of physiognomies, the difficulties in sympathizing with their students, wanderings in Brussels/Villette in moments of loneliness, and struggles to overcome national and religious prejudices). However, *The*

63 Brontë's husband, Arthur Bells Nichols, pointed out in the first edition of *The Professor* how much materials used in the latter novel had later been reincorporated in *Villette*. He also noted, however, that despite these similarities in contents, the two novels were "in most respects unlike" (Nichols, "Preface")

Professor also offers striking contrasts to its better-known successor. Written when Brontë's pain at Heger's unwillingness to respond to her letters was still fresh, *The Professor* exhibits a more critical and emotionally-charged tone with respect to the Belgian environment. Reimagined a decade later, after the death of her siblings, the Belgian experience evoked in *Villette* reflects the reconsideration of youthful emotions, the need for catharsis and closure, as well as the literary maturity that followed the success of *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849). Focusing on Brontë's descriptions of Brussels/Labassecour as multilingual cities and her use of the French language in *The Professor* and *Villette*, I seek to shed further light on the difference between earlier and later novels.

We have seen how Brontë seems to have immensely enjoyed the English lessons with Heger which briefly reversed the usual teacher-student dynamic. Likewise, in *Villette*, the discovery that words from the other's language can catalyze shared sensations and expression produces moments of multicultural connection. Though Brontë's French tutelage by Heger and its possible effects on her writing career has been researched,[64] linguistic exchanges and Brontë's use of French in *The Professor* have not been the subjects of significant literary criticism.[65] Such analysis can be used to better understand the novel's involvement in imagining cross-channel relations. It is worth noting that the number of passages in French (most of which are staged as interactions between William and Frances) is proportionately much greater in *The Professor* than in *Villette*. These passages in the early novel do more than add local color or boast of the author's then still fresh mastery over French. Unlike Lucy, who mainly refers to French to reflect on her confusion as a foreigner, or, when frustrated, to more efficiently express her anger

64 See Lonoff.
65 Let us note, however, William Cohen's contribution to the subject of Brontë's literary use of French in his article focussed on *Villette*.

towards her French-speaking environment,[66] William, though initially acknowledging some awkwardness when speaking the language,[67] rapidly switches to confident usage.

William's interest in languages is made clear early in the novel, making him appear to be a better candidate to embrace multicultural interactions than Lucy. Already in his discussions with his brother, William exhibits an interest in local accents (he observes, for example, that Edward spoke "with a guttural northern tone, which sounded harsh in my ears, accustomed to the silvery utterance of the South" [9]). His foreign language skills—his knowledge of French and German and ability to manage the "foreign correspondence of the House" (16)—are the primary reason for his employment.[68] William's attention to phonetic contrasts, which he connects to the socio-cultural differences between Northern and Southern England, finds an echo in his equal distaste for Flemish when compared to French and English. When a student struggles to read *The Vicar of Wakefield*, William comments, "My God! How he did snuffle, snort, and wheeze! All he said in his throat and nose, for it is thus that the *Flamands* speak" (53), a reaction that recalls Lucy's and may even echo Brontë's own response. As one who admits to pronouncing French in an "execrable South-of-England style," one imagines that William would feel some sympathy. That he does not illustrates how ready he is to exclude particular groups (in this case, the lower-class Flemish) from multicultural enthusiasm and positive curiosity.

66 Such as in her loud claim, during "Monsieur's fête," "Vive l'Angleterre, l'Histoire et les Héros! A bas la France, la Fiction et les Faquins!" (396)

67 This recognition of his presumed limitations in French might at times be perceived by the reader as false modesty, an attitude which Brontë also seemed to exhibit. William comes to Belgium with a stronger level of French than Lucy, and the speed of his progress is also more significant. As Shuttleworth points out, however, " his first experiences reinforce his alien status: he understands neither the Flemish maid nor the rapid French of the Belgian gentlemen he encounters." (Shuttleworth 175).

68 While it is also true of William, it is interesting to note Brontë's emphasis that Lucy finds her first employment by emphasizing her native tongue rather than a knowledge of a foreign language: "I believe if I had spoken French she would not have admitted me; but, as I spoke English, she concluded I was a foreign teacher come on business connected with the pensionnat, and, even at that late hour, she let me in, without a word of reluctance, or a moment of hesitation" (72).

Soon after his arrival, William marvels at the linguistic melting pot of Brussels, an admiration in which French plays a central role; he notes about "two gentlemen … talking in French:"

> [It was] impossible to follow their rapid utterance, or comprehend much of the purport of what they said—yet French, in the mouths of Frenchmen, or Belgians (I was not then sensible of the horrors of the Belgian accent) was as music to my ears. One … presently discerned me to be an Englishman—no doubt from the fashion in which I addressed the waiter; for I would persist in speaking French in my execrable South-of-England style, though the man understood English. The gentleman … politely accosted me in very good English; I remember I wished to God that I could speak French as well; his fluency and correct pronunciation impressed me for the first time with a due notion of the cosmopolitan character of the capital I was in; it was my first experience of that skill in living languages I afterwards found to be so general in Brussels. (48-49)

Striking here is William's perseverance in addressing these Belgians in French. As a first-person narrator, he cannot help but indicate, in hindsight, the limitations of his initially idealized vision of Belgium; yet, his position (unlike Lucy's) as a character "neither helpless nor cut off from communication" (Shuttleworth 175) and his regard for the "cosmopolitan character of the capital" suggest openness to multilinguistic and multicultural exploration.

Like M. Paul in *Villette*, William seems to recognize that mastery of multiple languages can help one to express oneself more accurately. Describing M. Pelet, William remarks that his "physiognomy was 'fine et spirituelle'" and uses French words because they "define better than any English terms the species of intelligence with which his features were imbued" (52).

Interestingly, William's later usage of "vives impressions" (68) is echoed in *Villette* when M. Paul uses "impressions" to describe both his vision of the nun and his attraction to Lucy. However, for M. Paul, "impressions" refers to an epiphanic moment when his and Lucy's minds become "impressed" in an indelible way, connecting them intellectually and emotionally across the boundaries of nationality and religion. For William, "vives impressions" concerns his ability, as a young, foreign teacher, to "impress" the minds of his young female students as well the "impressions" he might receive in return by their flirtatious advances. M. Paul's usage relates to burgeoning love,[69] while William's involves humor, flirtation and the (sexualized) power of an instructor over his students: "I laughed—a sentiment of exquisite pleasure played over my nerves at the thought that 'vives impressions' were likely to be created" (68).

In their early interactions, William and Frances extensively mix English and French (beyond anything portrayed in *Villette* between Lucy and M. Paul). While insisting that Frances address him in English, William incorporates French words within his English discourse ("You had the habitude formerly I suppose—?" [116]). As they declare their love to each other in Chapter XXIII, their dialogue turns into a quick succession of sentences alternating French and English. This succession does not lead to confusion because, Brontë implies, Frances and William understand French and English equally well (at least on the level that each speaks it). On the surface, this bilingualism, in a city William admires for its "cosmopolitan" flair, looks like an early attempt to portray a cross-channel, cross-cultural dialogue. However, a closer look at *The Professor*, suggests that, unlike in *Villette*, English-French interaction can be as much a

69 Brontë herself developed a very personal, specific use of French in her interactions with Heger. As Barker reveals, "It is almost as if the constraints of writing in a foreign language actually liberated her: she could put into French what she could not say in English because she did not have to face up the hard truth of what she said" (519). The implied effects of multilingualism are different from what *Villette* suggests. If multilingualism brings people together in *Villette*, Brontë's use of French in her letters seem to simultaneously have allowed her to express her deepest feelings, but also to relativize ownership of these feelings.

sign of cultural tension as cultural conciliation. William describes his sensations after hearing Frances speak English for the first time as follows:

> I looked up in amazement; the voice was a voice of Albion; the accent was pure and silvery; it only wanted firmness, and assurance, to be the counterpart of what any well-educated lady in Essex or Middlesex might have enounced, yet the speaker or reader was no other than Mdlle. Henri... (105)

William's first encounter with Frances is through identifying her as "a voice of Albion"—even though Frances's primary language of communication is French.[70] This identification of English voice is echoed by Lucy's recognition of Graham's when she first hears him in Villette. Attention to Frances's "pure and silvery" accent leads not to estrangement (as with William's Flemish students), but to a recognition of nation-based similarities ("silvery" was, after all, the term William used to describe his own Southern accent). William quickly makes it a point to "learn what she has of English in her besides the name of Frances Evan" (112). Not unlike Henry Higgins in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913), William aims at erasing signs of linguistic (and cultural) difference in his pupil. Unlike Eliza Doolittle, however, Frances needs surprisingly little help to become "the counterpart of any well-educated lady in Essex or Middlesex:" She might be of a partly different national background, but she is very much of William's social class and, unlike M. Paul, is already Protestant. Frances, like William, idealizes Britain in naïve, somewhat juvenile ways, which further facilitates her cultural conversion.[71]

William at first romanticizes Frances's use of French ("I wish I might write all she said to me in French—it loses sadly by being translated into English" [129]), but his increasing

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70 See, for example, "she answered with only so much hesitation as was rendered inevitable by the difficulty she experienced in improvising the translation of her thoughts from French to English" (119).
71 See Buzard,"William begins to mythologize his pupil as a kernel of pure Englishness, doing so in about equal measure as she mythologizes the English homeland she has never seen" (Buzard 180).

insistence that Frances address him in English suggests that he perceives bilingualism as a hindrance to their relation rather than added value. After William and Frances marry, he makes sure that English is the primary (if not the sole) language of their relationship. “Talk French to me she would,” William playfully narrates, “and many a punishment she has had for her wilfulness—I fear the choice of chastisement must have been injudicious, for instead of correcting the fault, it seemed to encourage its renewal” (211). When Frances teases him for his “*bizarreries anglaises*,” he writes, “I made her get a book, and read English to me for an hour by way of penance … [Wordsworth's] language … was not facile to her; she had to ask questions, to sue for explanations; to be like a child and a novice and to acknowledge me as her senior and director” (212-213).

While William's tone in this passage is humorous and even erotic, it also denotes a particular sense of detachment and self-assurance. Narrated as though it were a small bump on the road to marital bliss, Frances's continued insistence on using French is presented as a somewhat vain attempt at questioning his authority as her husband, her “master,” her “senior and director,” and, one may add, still very much her “professor.” Interestingly, Williams’ reaction to Frances's use of French calls the cultural “compatibility” between the two protagonists into question: Frances laments William's “*bizzarreries anglaises*” (“English peculiarities”) and “*caprices insulaires*” (“insular whims”).[72] In his determination to restore linguistic (and cultural)

72 Note that, while our modern use of the English “insular” may refer to both a connection to an island and a sense of peculiarity/uniqueness (as a result from isolation), the meaning of the French term “insulaire,” at the time, tended to primarily refer to the first meaning. Early in the nineteenth century, the French term was used in opposition to “Continental” and frequently linked to Britain (see https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/insulaire). What Frances expresses through her use of the word is thus that William's attitude is not only odd, but that this oddness is also rooted in his Britishness.
Also note the contrast between France's use of the word “caprices” and William's use of the word “malice.” The first word denotes simple childishness, while the second refers to a form of willful malevolence (see also his use of the words “wickedness,” or “demon”). It is ironic that William, as a first-person narrator, should choose a French word to describe Frances' reprehensible action of using French. This use has more to do with proving some form of teacherly multilingual mastery than any form of deep empathy for the language of the Other. William proves doubly in control by using the language of the Other to reprimand this Other for the use of her own language.

order to his otherwise "heaven"-like home, Williams' response—forcing Frances to read difficult texts in English as a "way of penance," becomes a "punishment"—is, no matter how eroticized, a means of reminding Frances of her inferior cultural status. To her simple, conversational French is contrasted texts from great English poets like Wordsworth, who, we learn, "steadied her soon" (212). The decision, after a few years, to move away from their French-speaking part of Brussels and to settle in England—strongly contrasting with Lucy's intention to remain in Villette—epitomizes my point about *The Professor*'s experiment with cross-channel encounters: while multicultural exploration plays a role in the romance, William is a lot less willing to let it shape his life than Lucy is in *Villette.*[73] The move to England might be introduced as a way for Frances to realize "the dream of her lifetime" (215), but it also has the advantage, from William's perspective, of uprooting her (and their child Victor) from a French-speaking cultural environment.

What a study of language use in *The Professor* thus reveals is that, while William might have seemed (through his command of languages, his erudition, his mobility) the ideal candidate for a constructive exploration of cross-channel exchanges, he instead turns out to be a rather conservative model of monoculturalism. As such, he resembles *Villette*'s Graham a lot more than Lucy, particularly in his efforts to live the life of an Englishman in Brussels. Whereas Lucy, in *Villette*, stumbles upon Mrs. Bretton's residence by accident and experiences both nostalgia and disorientation in the uncanny British interior, both Graham and William cherish English portability. Indeed, this is already apparent when William, discovering his Belgian lodgings, recalls memories of his London hotel room before departing for the Continent:

73 Gender expectations naturally also play an important role. As a married man, William finds it easy to recross the Channel and settle in Britain. Lucy, however, remains a spinster, making her social status in Britain as uncomfortable as it was when she left it.

> I looked forth into a wide, lofty foreign chamber—how different from the small and dingy, though not uncomfortable apartment, I had occupied for a night or two at a respectable inn in London… Yet far be it from me to profane the memory of that little dingy room! It too is dear to my soul, for there, as I lay in quiet and darkness, I first heard the great bell of St. Paul's telling London it was midnight, and well do I recall the deep deliberate tones, so full charged with colossal phlegm and force. From small, narrow window of that room, I first saw *the* Dome, looking through a London Mist. I suppose the sensations stirred by those first sounds, first sights are felt but once; treasure them, Memory! seal them in urns and keep them in safe niches! (48)

The irony of this passage is that, in William's mind, the past memory of a "small and dingy" London apartment, with its "small, narrow window(s)" should so readily displace the present experience of "a wide, lofty foreign chamber." The London room may have been cramped but it was both enchantingly near to London's famous cathedral and "respectable" (a feature that both *The Professor* and *Villette* imply is lacking in Catholic society). William's reference to his spiritual experience at the sight of "*the* Dome" can be contrasted to M. Paul's doubts at the sight of the ghostly nun. The effect is to reassure William himself as well as his readers that allegiances to England will remain as "charged with colossal phlegm and force" as the sound of St Paul's bells. He is less interested in any present "sensations stirred by [the] first sounds, first sights" of his Continental environment than in the memory of Britain that can be stored in the mind's "urns" and "safe niches." The hotel scene anticipates and encapsulates William's pull away from the cosmopolitan or cross-channel, and toward the rooted and national.

Throughout his narrative, William projects English markers onto elements of the Labassecourian/Belgian environment. For example, while socializing with Mr. Pelet, he cannot help but enjoy the fact that he and his guest "were seated, almost in English comfort, on each side of the hearth, a little round table between [them] with a coffee-pot, a sugar basin and two large china cups" (76). This fixation on English memories and experiences pervades the relationship between William and Frances—as though their success as a couple depends on Frances's ability to prove her assimilation through a proper reenactment of these rituals. During one early interaction, Frances reveals her anxiety at meeting William's expectations as a Briton:

> The fire being lit, the hearth swept, and a small kettle of a very antique pattern, such as I thought I remembered to have seen in old farmhouses in England, placed over the now ruddy flame, Frances' hands were washed, and her apron removed in an instant; then she opened a cupboard, and took out a tea-tray, on which she had soon arranged a china tea-equipage, whose pattern, shape, and size, denoted a remote antiquity; a little, old-fashioned silver spoon was deposited in each saucer; and a pair of silver tongs, equally old-fashioned, were laid on the sugar-basin; from the cupboard, too, was produced a tidy silver cream-ewer, not larger than an egg-shell. While making these preparations, she chanced to look up, and, reading curiosity in my eyes, she smiled and asked—
>
> "Is this like England, monsieur?"
>
> "Like the England of a hundred years ago," I replied.
>
> "Is it truly? Well, everything on this tray is at least a hundred years old: these cups, these spoons, this ewer, are all heirlooms; my great-grandmother left them to my

> grandmother, she to my mother, and my mother brought them with her from England to Switzerland, and left them to me; and, ever since I was a little girl, I have thought I should like to carry them back to England, whence they came."
>
> She put some pistolets on the table; she made the tea, as foreigners do make tea--i.e., at the rate of a teaspoonful to half-a-dozen cups; she placed me a chair, and, as I took it, she asked, with a sort of exaltation—
>
> "Will it make you think yourself at home for a moment?"
>
> "If I had a home in England, I believe it would recall it," I answered; and, in truth, there was a sort of illusion in seeing the fair-complexioned English-looking girl presiding at the English meal, and speaking in the English language.
>
> "You have then no home?" was her remark.
>
> "None, nor ever have had. If ever I possess a home, it must be of my own making, and the task is yet to begin." (145)

Despite his somewhat ambiguous relation to the idea of “home,” William's recollection of Frances's movements and her many objects evokes an experience of Britishness akin to Lucy's awakening in Mrs. Breton's residence in *Villette*. These ritualistic instruments of tea-making, despite their age, do not appear in William's mind as misplaced, ghostly artifacts, but rather as so many triggers for enjoyable memories of Britishness. Their age, and the fact they are still in use, implies the unwavering continuity of British culture. While William complains that Frances's tea is “little better than hot water, sugar and milk” (146), the “sort of illusion” created by the scene (in which William appears a captivated

and somewhat voyeuristic audience) is not one imbued with an uncanny, but with a seductive, almost erotic character. Seduction takes place because Frances's attempts to recreate a typically British moment for her love interest trigger his nostalgia. Interestingly, this scene also reveals that the "English-looking" Frances has been carrying around, through inheritance, a kind of portable Englishness that is more tangible than William's vague memories, yet which she uses in an awkward, "foreign" way.

Such objects become teaching tools in turning Frances into the "well-educated [British] lady" (105) William envisions. He proudly notes, as a positive development of their relationship, that Frances's cooking conforms more and more to his expectations: she makes him tea "in rational English style" and "administers" "a proper British repast" (206). That these details follow the revelation of their marriage, makes clear that English speech and conduct are a tacit expectation for a successful marriage abroad. When Williams proposes, he asks, "Will my pupil consent to pass her life with me? *Speak English now*, Frances" (187, my emphasis). In the romantic idyll that follows their marriage, markers of Britishness (to which the English language clearly contributes) increase in numbers and are willfully projected onto their Belgian environment, as in the following passage:

> We were soon clear of Brussels; the fields received us, and then the lanes, remote from carriage-resounding chaussées. Erelong we came upon a nook, so rural, so green and secluded, it might have been a spot in some pastoral English province; … we … admired and examined some English-looking wild-flowers growing at our feet... (207)

William's determination to see an "English province" in a Belgian landscape, suggests his increasing attachments to Britain—anticipating the couple's decision to leave Belgium

permanently. Thus, *The Professor* is a novel whose main characters are ultimately more invested in Englishness than in sustained cultural dialogue and exchange.

Why did Brontë need to reimagine Belgium?

Since both novels exhibit references to Charlotte's stay at the Heger *Pensionnat*, it has been tempting for biographers to fill gaps in or conjecture about that interlude on the basis of these fictional accounts.[74] Adopting the perspective of a young female first-person narrator, the later novel has often been described as "the most autobiographical of all of Charlotte's novels" (Rosengarten and Smith, xi). Charlotte's emotional distance from her Belgian experience, as well as the loss of her last siblings, might have influenced *Villette*. Yet, despite the novel's basis in autobiographical knowledge of Belgian history, *Villette* is set in an imaginary location: Labassecour and the eponymous capital of Villette. In what follows, I explore two possible contexts for this choice: the changing cultural and political climate of the late 1840s between Britain and Belgium and the question of how a fictionalization of the Belgian space could help Brontë set up a more fitting environment for the kind of cross-channel relations she was set to explore and describe.

We have seen how critics connect both novels to the deep-seated Victorian distrust of Roman Catholicism.[75] The long-lasting resentment that followed the struggles around the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829), the large influx of Irish immigrants following the Great Famine, and the Papal Aggression of 1850 all meant that anti-Catholic feelings were ascendant at the time Brontë wrote her two novels. In the mid-Victorian public imagination, Belgium in the 1840s was sometimes perceived as "an ultra-Catholic country," a feeling that certainly reflected

74 For an insightful analysis of Brontë's use of the autobiographical genre in *Villette*, see Carlisle. Conversely, see Glen's *Imagination in History* for a reading of *Villette* as revealing elements of Brontë's biography.
75 For more on the topic, see Peschier, Thormählen and Paz.

the reality of the overwhelmingly Catholic composition of the Belgian population (François 88). However, as Wong points out, such interpretations "too easily align Catholicism with Belgium and Protestantism with England" (8). British perceptions of Belgium shifted several times during the nineteenth century, and discourses about its Catholicism shifted along with them. The role of Belgian Catholics in overthrowing Dutch Protestant influence during the revolution meant that the newly-created Belgian government was received with some suspicion. But the smooth economic development that followed reassured the Victorian public and affirmed Britain's decision to support independence. This proof of Belgians' industry created the positive image of a Catholicism that embraced industry, progress and liberty rather than poverty and authoritarianism.[76] In his findings on British perception of Belgium, François undermines a monolithic understanding of Victorian attitudes towards Continental Catholicism when he points out that many mid-Victorians went as far as wondering if Belgians would eventually convert to Protestantism.[77]

The European revolutions of 1848, which took place between the writing of the two novels had a significant impact—for better and worse—on British perceptions of Belgium. Despite the pressure of French revolutionaries to spread chaos beyond France's borders, Belgium did not experience major unrest, and its political and economical stability once again made it stand out in British eyes. Ironically, however, it also led some commentators to claim that

76 See Francois (86)

77 See Francois, "Compared with the British perception of Continental Catholicism in the mid-nineteenth century in general, the perception of Belgian Catholicism has always been less hostile, the rejection less total. This relatively more positive attitude towards Belgian Catholicism reflected the general British sympathy for Belgium. … [T]he idea became highly popular that the true Belgian national identity was Protestant in nature and that the Belgians were in fact hidden Protestants" (87). And for more on this observation, also see François, 97-102.

This notion of Belgians as quasi-Protestants may find an echo in William's belief that his initial love interest, Zoraïde, would readily convert to Protestantism. This conversion seems to fail because Zoraïde, in stereotypical Catholic fashion, betrays William's love while Pelet betrays his friendship. Note that, at the time when *The Professor* was written, the popularity of the image of Belgians as "hidden Protestants" might also have started to wane ("By the late 1840s British observers realized more and more that time alone might not be sufficient for a Protestant victory in Belgium" [François 101]), potentially also explaining the failure of Zoraïde's conversion.

Belgians had simply been too lazy or too ignorant to care about this revolutionary movement (see François 58-59). British admiration for Belgian stability was followed by "a certain indifference" and an "emerging image of a prosperous, dull and boring Belgium" (Francois 59) —a common perception when Brontë started writing *Villette*. Perceptions of Belgians as "hidden Protestants" and Belgium as "a little Britain on the Continent" had also waned by that time. That Brontë did not pursue a conversion plot in the later *Villette* (unlike what can observed in *The Professor*) may suggest that she had little confidence in conversion as a compelling theme.

Understanding these Belgo-British perceptions helps shed light on Brontë's decision to avoid direct mention of Brussels and Belgium in her fourth novel. On a purely commercial level, even if the narrative time markers of both *The Professor* and *Villette* remain somewhat unclear, Belgium, as a novelistic setting, would have appeared even less appealing to readers in the1850s than a decade earlier. In other words, Brontë might have avoided using Brussels as the backdrop for *Villette* to prevent readers from associating the novel too readily with the then widespread negative perceptions of Belgium. Hence, though Enlgishness is portable in *The Professor*, in *Villette*, Lucy finds the effort to create a "little Britain" on the Continent uncanny.

This change of perception might not be, however, the sole reason that spurred Charlotte to invent Labassecour. Critics such Margareth Smith have shown how *The Professor* reflects Brontë's disappointment with her romance with Constantin Heger ("Introduction," ix). William's general (and increasing) disdain for the Belgians (and French) around him, the refusal to represent successful inter-religious love other than through conversion, and the return to England indeed suggest that the earlier novel associates "Belgium" with a site of frustration and heartbreak. Given its many biographical and historical references, *Villette*'s primary setting stands forth, on this view, as a Brussels that does not tell its name, described by a more mature

Brontë who acquired some intellectual and emotional distance. Yet, as I have suggested, this same unnamed Brussels becomes the stage for a different, more complex kind of multiculturalism and possibilities of cross-channel love. This critical distance from her own personal experiences in Brussels further entails the use of a particularly self-reflective and self-critical first-person narrator: the sign of a mature author, ready to detach her imagination from personal romantic failure and to envision new forms of multicultural commitment in general. It is in this context that recreating Belgium also became necessary.

By imagining Villette, Brontë created a form of alternative universe—a Villette that is not truly Brussels, a Lucy that is not truly Charlotte, a M. Paul that is not truly Heger, even though real characteristics of these entities abound in her novel. Expanding on this process, we can observe that Labassecour is not truly Belgium, but also not truly France and not truly England—in "miniature" form or not—and thus also, as I have shown earlier, not truly a meeting of the two. The transformation of Brussels into Villette does more, I argue, than point to a transformation of a city into either a "simulacrum of Brussels imagined as an 'imperfect imitation of Paris'" or "a substitute for London as 'minor' metropolis" (Bonfiglio 613). It becomes an experimental imaginary stage, a literary invention that helps Brontë expand her exploration of multicultural understanding and love to more abstract, less recognizably historically-grounded levels, while still being very much defined through the everyday, relatable experiences of individuals. Belgium's qualities as a multilingual, multicultural city are not stripped away in *Villette* but, through a refusal to name the city and country by their names, Brontë ensures that her readers retain their focus on the personal, inter-relational possibilities at play in these multicultural exchanges, rather than try to read the successes or failures of this relation through their contemporary vision of and prejudices about any specific Continental country. While

Belgian history and the history of British perception of Belgium obviously shape *Villette*, the novel invites its readers to believe that the increasingly loving relation between Lucy and M. Paul could, in theory, have happened anywhere, and thus allowed Brontë "to consider [the theme of foreign cultural experience] within a more broadly European context" (Shuttleworth 181).

It takes putting *The Professor* and *Villett*e side by side—not to highlight their similarities but to acknowledge their different treatment of multicultural exchanges—to appreciate Brontë's imaginative growth between her defensive account of such exchanges in *The Professor* and, less than a decade later, her vision of a much more flexible, tolerant and mutually beneficial cultural open-mindedness in *Villette*. While the marriage of William and Frances in *The Professor* might offer a form of "happy ending," from a multicultural perspective, both *The Professor* and *Villette* actually seem to share a somewhat bleak conclusion. In *The Professor*, the failure of multicultural connection between William and Zoraïde and the narrative of "reincorporation" and "conversion" of Frances into the British cultural realm[78] mirrors a harsh mid-Victorian reality of non-acceptance of the Other in their cultural diversity, one which Brontë's own experience partly reflected.[79] In *Villette*, Lucy and M. Paul's idyl is cut short by his death at sea. Both novels reveal that a fully realized multicultural connection, in which equal respect is awarded to the culture, nationality and religion of each participant in that connection, is something quite difficult to achieve, and something that even "fate" might have to put an end to. But while the deus-ex-machina of M. Paul's disappearance leaves many readers perplexed and frustrated, it also invites them to wonder about the future of Lucy's multicultural journey.

78 The narrative implies, mainly through William's own voice, that Frances is a "lost sheep" (142) in search of a "Promised Land" (208), that her Britishness is dormant and needs to be reactivated. It also documents how Frances eventually marries a man increasingly eager to strip her of her non-British attributes and multi-cultural uniqueness.
79 With limits, since the main "obstacle" to Brontë's love to Heger, besides cultural and religious difference, was obviously the fact that the latter was already married.

Despite the bitterness of the novel's last line,[80] the high probability that Lucy will be staying in her Villette school without ever returning to England, suggests that she might not quite be "retaining her Englishness to the end" (Wong 16). On the other hand, to say that she was (and still will be) "ready to enter eagerly into [M. Paul's] language and culture" (Shuttleworth 177) might be an equally radical way to imagine her future. Instead, I argue, the novel invites its readers to imagine Lucy as adopting a form of multiculturalism that embraces the intellectual and emotional wealth offered by both her native and her local cultural environments. As Bonfiglio notes, resting on the work of Miller and Cohen, Brontë's refusal to let Lucy and M. Paul be happily married stems from her desire to "resist the perfectionist narrative of marriage as a solution to the novel's epistemological concerns" and her refusal to "solve the problem of self-development through the marriage plot" (612). *Villette*, he argues, "seduc[es] the reader into desiring [Lucy and M. Paul's] marriage" while "emphasizing the irreconciliability of [their] religious and cultural conflicts" (612). While, as suggested earlier, a marriage twist in *Villette* would indeed have the potential to endanger the remarkable balance of power achieved by Lucy and M. Paul in their search for mutual multicultural acceptance, this notion of "irreconciliability," I argue, is questionable, precisely given the state of Lucy and M. Paul's relation before the death of the latter. *Villette*, while letting fate force a physical separation between two individuals from diverse national, religious and cultural backgrounds, shows that such "reconciliation" does not only belong to the realm of the theoretical, but was about to become real.

M. Paul's death and Lucy's decision to stay in the town of Villette might thus also have something to do with Brontë's desire to simultaneously underline and keep intact the exceptional

80 One that takes a stab at what Brontë cannot help but perceive as Belgian pettiness and unfairness: "Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell." (573)

character of the relationship she has described thus far. M. Paul's death might be an indicator that, at the current stage of mid-Victorian perceptions of multicultural, inter-religious relations across the Channel, the kind of partnership the Protestant Lucy and the Roman Catholic M. Paul have developed is simply not quite ready to fully materialize yet. As such, it would be further proof of Brontë's "pessimistic [feelings] about the potential for real change outside the fictional world novel" (Molloy 110). However, one could also argue that, through the death of M. Paul and through Lucy's evident commitment to cherish his memory while staying in Villette, Brontë manages to *crystallize* a positive vision of such multicultural, inter-religious relation.

Thus, Brontë's choice to turn to the fictional town of *Villette* instead of Brussels, while still indirectly referencing her personal experience of Belgium, as well as alluding to specific elements of Belgian revolutionary history to contextualize and enrich her description of mutual multicultural awakening, also prevents her narrative to be colored by the specific post-1848 prejudices that British readers might have fostered towards the actual young nation. Brontë's simultaneous use of indirect historical (and biographical) allusions—which, as literary critics, we simply cannot ignore—and imaginative geographical framework contributes to create in *Villette* a work of fiction that manages to set itself both as culturally and historically specific, but also timeless. This sense of timelessness finds its strongest echo in how, by turning Brussels into Villette, Brontë created, through M. Paul's death, an imaginary intellectual space where his and Lucy's multicultural relationship, frozen in time, survives through and beyond Lucy, as it survives through and beyond the novel *Villette*.

CHAPTER 3

SOMETIMES A TOURIST, ALWAYS A POET: DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S ACCOUNT OF CONTINENTAL TOURISM, MEDIEVEAL AND POST-1848 BELGIUM IN *A TRIP TO PARIS AND BELGIUM* (1849)

A Trip to Paris and Belgium and its historical backdrop

On September 27, 1849, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt embarked on a short trip to Paris and Belgium. Rossetti, who financed the trip through one of his earliest sales as a painter,[81] took this trip at a crucial moment in the history of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: barely a year after the group's foundation. This was a time when its members actively sought to define their art and break onto the British cultural scene by publishing the first issue of their "manifesto," *The Germ*. Rossetti's letters testify to the sense of urgency that took over the Brotherhood at the time, as he and his friends were figuring out who would contribute to the journal, which texts and visual artifacts to include, and how to insure a successful distribution.[82] With so much at stake and less than a month before *The Germ*'s first issue, one might wonder what led Rossetti and Hunt to suddenly leave Britain.

Both Rossetti's letters and poems make clear that *The Germ* was always on his mind while abroad[83] but, while he continued his editorial work via his correspondence with his brother

81 *The Girlhood of the Virgin Mary* (1849)

82 See Doughty (90).

83 Consider the poem "To the P.R.B," in which Rossetti lists a few members, and ponders about their activities, or the direct logistical questions to his brother interspersed in the sequence, such as at the end of "Boulogne to Amiens and Paris."

William Michael, he considered his Continental visit of equal importance: whereas publishing *The Germ* would introduce the Brotherhood to present and future artists and critics, his Continental trip was intended to explore and confirm its aesthetic roots. Admiration for early Renaissance and medieval art characterized pre-Raphaelitism[84] and interest in Belgium went hand in hand with this preoccupation: the visit was seen as an opportunity to experience "in the flesh" the works of revered artists such as Memling and Van Eyck exhibited there. Central to Rossetti's attraction to the art of the Middle Ages was its high level of craftsmanship, idiosyncrasy and relative anonymity at a time when Victorian art was threatened by mechanization, duplication and the cult of celebrity. Medieval art disrupted contemporary certainties and piqued Rossetti's interest by questioning the relations between objects, observer, and point of view as a result of its pre-linear perspective.[85] Rossetti, unlike his Romantic predecessors, felt the pull of the medieval not in nostalgia but in the needs of his time.[86] Furthermore, despite the religious themes of many of his ekphrastic poems and paintings, his use of Catholic iconography when combined with medieval and early-Renaissance themes, had more to do with his interest in their aesthetics than with religious or moral effects. Unlike his travel companion, Rossetti, despite having been raised by a devout Catholic mother, "had little or no sincere Christian faith" (Riede, "The Pre-Raphaelite School," 306), and was not a moralist.

Rossetti wrote about his encounters with the works of Flemish masters as well as about his traveling experiences in France and Belgium in letters, but also in sonnets and blank verse. These poems, most of which Rossetti included in his letters to his brother William Michael

84 John E. Millais and William Morris, both spent a significant amount of time in Belgium for the same reason.
85 For more on the subject, see "The Camera Obscura and Its Subject" in Crary.
86 Medieval art became for Rossetti, as Helsinger explains in her study of the artist's ekphrastic poems, "a source of illumination in the present" but, uninterested in historiographical explanations, "[i]t was the strangeness of the past and its potential to interrupt those narratives that appealed to him" (27). Helsinger shows how this interest in early Renaissance art, far from being a conservative move, was for Rossetti directly connected to a reflection about what, in his eyes, was lacking in modern British art (26).

during the trip, were published in a posthumous collection three decades later as a sequence entitled *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*.[87] As an artist seeking recognition in the early 1850s, Rossetti dismissed this early work, which he remained staunchly reluctant to publish in full, describing it as "juvenile or inferior."[88] About the trip itself, he declared that, with the exception of paintings that had made him and Hunt "richer in minds but without change of purpose," he had seen "nothing when abroad" (Doughty 86), a nonchalant comment which encouraged critics to focus instead on his ekphrastic poems. Indeed, while critics have invariably noted the meaningful repercussions of this trip on Rossetti's aesthetics through studies of his "Sonnets for pictures[89]," the travel poems have, with rare exceptions,[90] received little to no critical attention.

In this chapter, I investigate these lesser-known poems, particularly those dealing with train travel and visits of French and Belgian landmarks, and I shed light on their peculiar nature as early works very much in line with Rossetti's burgeoning pre-Raphaelite aesthetic agenda. I argue that these poems, sometimes referred to by Rossetti as mere ways to "pass time" while traveling towards the real highlights of his trip (viewing the works of medieval artists and the places they lived in), intricately interweave first, themes at the heart of the pre-Raphaelite movement such as the pre-Raphaelite interest in the sensorial and the imaginative, second, reflections on mid-nineteenth century traveling and its discomfort, third, thoughts on 1849 Belgium as a nation simultaneously rooted in its medieval past yet looking to the future as an

87 This collection, first published in 1886 by William Michael, was augmented in 1895 and 1911. While recent editions of the poet's collected works claim to publish the sequence in full (McGann 412), they follow William Michael's decision to separate from the sequence the better-known poems. So the six poems constituting, in the fourth issue of *The Germ*, the sequence "Sonnets for Pictures," but also poems such as "At Boulogne: Upon The Cliffs: Noon" (renamed "The Sea-Limits" and included in the sequence *The Songs* [1870]) or even "World's Worth" are not included in *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*.
88 See William Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Family Letters,* 55. William Michael's interest was only slightly greater, as shown by his somewhat uninspired comment that the theme of train travel, unusual for the time was just enough to warrant publication.
89 See for example Goldberg and Ormond.
90 See Bentley, "A Pre-Raphaelite Abroad."

expanding industrial nation and fourth, questions about the nature of poetry itself and Belgium's potential as poetic material. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I compare Rossetti's poetic treatment of his Belgian environment with poems by the American Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and an earlier travel narrative on Belgium by the French Theophile Gautier. Working through these comparisons, I shed light on how each respective author's nationality subtly inflects their literary visions of Belgium and its past, and conclude with an investigation of Rossetti's views on the questionable role of artistic institutions on "true" aesthetic experience.

Train travels and cathedrals' tops – investigating the range of Rossetti's aesthetic experiences

Prior to the release of the first issue of *The Germ* in January 1850, the members of the Brotherhood agreed to keep religion and politics out of it.[91] The aesthetic agenda of the Brotherhood, they believed, needed to be sequestered from the noise of political and religious interference. In order to obtain Christina Rossetti's agreement to include two of her own poems in the issue ("Dream Land" and "An End"), Dante promised her that it would not "expound revolutionary politics and atheism" (Doughty 92). *The Germ* was thus presented by Rossetti as an artistic journal solely focused on the Brotherhood's aesthetic interests.[92] By refusing to address the hot topics of the day (Church politics, Factory Reform, Corn-Law Reform and, on the Continent, the Spring of Nations), the members kept the focus on Art as its own form of politics and indirectly questioned the general public's obsession with questions about party politics, religion and trade at the expense of the role of Art and imagination in what the members perceived as a culturally impoverished British society. Seven poems written by Rossetti during

91 The decision was made before the first issue of *The Germ*, but after Rossetti and Hunt's trip on the Continent.
92 This was an unfashionable decision which Oswald Daughty sees as responsible for the journal's downfall (98).

his trip made it to the third and fourth issues of *The Germ.*[93] Only two of them were not ekphrastic. The poems written during the trip but excluded from *The Germ* (and later published in *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*) did not all exhibit obvious political contents. Conversely, not all poems published in *The Germ* were devoid of political subtext. However, although some of the poems published in the *Germ* express political views (for example "The Staircase of Notre-Dames, Paris"), especially when read in the context of the whole sequence, those views always primarily served—rather than guided—the poet's aesthetic interests.

Interest in Rossetti's political stance and its influence on his poetry started in the mid 1970s with critics Florence Saunders Boos and D.M.R Bentley.[94] Reasons for the former critical reluctance to approach the topic stemmed from biographers' affirmation of the poet's "aesthete's reputation for tuning out political matters" (Keirstead 76), but, as D.M.R Bentley shows, "despite [his] own assertions to the contrary, Rossetti was far from indifferent to politics, either in his youth, in his 'prime,' or in his 'decline'" (159). Bentley points out the political engagement of Rossetti's family, as well as the political themes permeating poems such as "The English Revolution of 1848," "At the Sun-Rise in 1848," "Vox Ecclesiae, Vox Christi," "On the Field of Waterloo," or "The Burden of Nineveh." Interesting for my argument is the fact, with the exception of the last one, all of these poems were written either during or in response to Rossetti's 1849 Continental visit, and/or are concerned with the 1848 Revolutions.[95] In these poems, the tone is sarcastic, comic, and even black comedic, making a political interest palpable, but an underlying political stance difficult to pin down. Similarly, while, in *A trip to Paris and*

93 "Carillon" (later renamed "Antwerp to Bruges"), "From the Cliffs: Noon" (later renamed "At Boulogne. Upon the Cliffs: Noon") and the six ekphrastic *Sonnets for Pictures*, "'A Virgin and Child" "'A Marriage of St. Katherine'" "'A Dance of Nymphs'" "'A Venetian Pastoral'" and the two-parts "'Angelica rescued from the Sea-Monster'"
94 See Boos and Bentley.
95 Rossetti's political involvement can also be seen in poems tackling the political situation of Italy, such as "On Refusal of Aid between Nations," "After the French Liberation of Italy" or "A Last Confession."

Belgium, the backdrop of the 1848 Revolution plays an unmistakable role in coloring the poet's perceptions not only of France, but also of Belgium, Rossetti strives to ensure that politics do not overshadow the aesthetic agenda he is developing for himself and the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

While conversations about the 1848 revolutions dominated British media,[96] Rossetti's stance towards them was "guardedly optimistic" (Bentley 165). Surely, poems such as "The English Revolution of 1848," written soon after the London Chartist demonstration and humorously warning that "La Reine Victoria" (line 12) might soon experience a similar fate as "France King Louy-Phil. [who] was shaken out like chaff"[97] (line 10), or the more serious "At the Sun-Rise in 1848," do not express obvious support or rejection of revolutions. Such moderation would appear in line with the guarded contemporary British attitude towards the Spring of Nations. When reading lines such as "The round world keeps its balancing; / On this globe, they [the French] and we [the British] are opposite" (lines 7-8) in "At the Sun-Rise in 1848," one might even be tempted to interpret this indecisiveness as tacit condemnation, common at the time, of French political instability. Rossetti, son of Italians, divided between an eagerness to assert his Britishness[98] and Romantic sympathy for some of the revolutionary ideals,

96 The abdication of Louis-Phillipe and establishment of France's Second Republic were topics of intense scrutiny in Britain. The British were critical of the February Revolution and dismantling of the Bourbon monarchy, and the election of Louis Napoleon as president seemed to confirm the suspicions that France was ill equipped for self-governance. The 1848 Revolution confirmed the prejudices against the French as immoral, papist and unable to control their passions (for a thorough study of the British reaction to the 1848 Revolution, see Bensiom). William Hunt refers to the tense, post-revolutionary political context in his history of the PreRaphaelite movement, as he writes about the Revolution's effects on fellow French artists, as well as the state of fear and mistrust that still reigned during their visit (191-2).

97 The use of French ("La Reine Victoria") is humorous and echoes the thoughts of an imaginary French citizen and wishful thinking rather than a sign of francophile sympathy on Rossetti's part.

98 It is possible to read in Rossetti's tirades against the French the fashionable Francophobia reigning in England: "Un million d'habitants; / Cast up, they'll make an Englishman – perhaps" (lines 13-14), declares Rossetti's lyric speaker in "Last Sonnets at Paris." In "Ashore at Dover," the artist, now in Britain, closes with another token of his Anglophilia:

> The country somehow seems in earnest here,
> Grave and sufficient: - England, so to speak;
> No other word will make the thing as clear.

had to remain "cautious in his endorsement of liberty at the expense of authority" (Bentley 162). This depiction of a cautious, authority-loving Rossetti, however, does not match that of the man who became a major "troublemaker" in the history of British Arts.

To read such political ambivalence towards both France and Belgium as a sign of conservative adherence to Britain's own institutions would indeed be misleading. After all, describing the French and the British as the "opposite" on "the round world keep[ing] its balancing," while stressing difference, does not express personal support for one *or* the other.[99] Both in *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* and in his letters, Rossetti appears to disavow political intent,[100] but the fact that his poems (and paintings) at the time did not openly express any political agenda, whether revolutionary or reactionary, does not signal conservatism or apoliticalism but rather his heightened preoccupation with the aesthetic revolution that the members of the Brotherhood were setting in motion in Britain. Such aesthetic priorities at times affected his perception of the political environment of *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* (though rarely the other way around). The sequence of poems can be described as a striking early example of Rossetti's belief, developed more fully in the later years, that art is not meant to be at the service of the political, even if challenging artistic institutions and practices can eventually lead to a reexamination of their political environment.

"Ah! Habit," you exclaim, "and prejudice!"
If so, so be it. One don't care to shriek,
"Sir, this shall be!" But one believes it is. (lines 9-14)

That Rossetti loves England seems certain but, precisely for that reason, he is not completely satisfied by the current state of affairs of this "grave and sufficient" nation (line 10), particularly when it comes to the Arts.

99 While France was often presented as Britain's archetypal enemy in the Victorian imagination, Rossetti refused to take clear stances. In the 1849 "Vox Ecclesiae, Vox Christi," Rossetti walks a fine line and distracts his readers' attention from the poem's indirect support to the French revolutionaries by condemning the actions of the Catholic Church, a political and spiritual body which the British perceived as sharply opposed to their own values.

100 This explains the reluctance of early critics to view them as entry points to his political engagement with the Continent. Consider McGann, "One of this sequence's most interesting aspects is its deliberately apolitical focus" (412). Out of the "nine 'political' sonnets" Boos lists in her study, only "Place de Bastille" is taken from *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*. Meanwhile, in "Political Themes in the Work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Bentley only adds "On the Field of Waterloo."

While museum-going was the primary goal of Rossetti and Hunt's trip, Rossetti's poems also record his impressions before their arrival in Paris as they travel by train. Disseminated throughout the sequence are the poet's depictions of landscapes seen through the train's window. These fleeting visions are an important part of *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* because of the leisure to write that train travel afforded. The speed and noise of the train do not always make for easy or comfortable viewing and writing experiences, however, as Riede points out, Rossetti's verse in these poems, "records not nature, but perception, and reflects an impressionistic rather than a purely mimetic art" (Riede, *Dante Gabriel Revisited*, 47). As such, they also echo the poet's state of mind. These seemingly banal poems partake in the broader reflection on matters of perception and aesthetics which Rossetti set on engaging during his trip while also telling us a great deal about his awareness of Continental politics. The first poem, "London to Folkstone," is written in blank verse like most of his poems on train travel. As such, particularly when read alongside his letters to his brother, they constitute a continuation of these diary-like epistles,[101] and the more conversational tone allowed by the poetic form seems to go hand in hand with a type of content that seems mundane. Registering the short British part of the trip, the poet shares his perceptions as he alternates between visions of the inside of his coach and of the English landscape. It is followed by another poem, "Boulogne to Amiens and Paris," which similarly describes the French country-side. In these two poems, Rossetti focuses on how alternating types of agricultural fields and miscellaneous greenery impress on his mind. They both seem to exhibit the "apolitical focus" McGann ascribes to Rossetti's trip (412), but are not devoid of political awareness. The British landscape, in spite of its variety, is described as ordered and predictable, as shown by the repetition of the expression "at intervals" ("trees that in moving keep their

101 This blurring of boundaries between poems and letters is particularly apparent in the last nine lines of "Boulogne to Amiens and Paris," in which Rossetti gives his brother instructions, in blank verse, on how to mail him a document.

intervals" (line 10), "Pauses of water soon, at intervals" (line 43)). British fields are neatly fenced ("wires – a constant chain" (line 4)) and delimited ("mown in ridges" (line 28)). No pasture, where a cow is "feeding among her fellows that feed on" (line 13), is left unused. This description of the British country-side, colored by a vision of orderly, effective agricultural production, is then followed by one on the other side of the Channel, in "Boulogne to Amiens and Paris." There, the poet observes,

> Sometimes the country spreads aloof in tracts
> Smooth for the harvest; …
> Sometimes tall poplar-wands stand white, their heads
> Outmeasuring the distant hills. Sometimes
> The ground has deep greenness; sometimes brown
> In stubble; and sometimes no ground at all,
> For the close strength of crops that stand unreaped.
> The water-plots are sometimes all the sun's –
> Sometimes quite green through shadows filling them,
> Or islanded with growth of reeds, – or else
> Masked in grey dust like the wide face o' the fields.
> And still the swiftness lasts; that to our speed
> The trees seem shaken like a press of spears. (lines 8-9, 13-23)

Instead of meeting with the same type of scenery "at intervals," Rossetti, as his repeated use of "sometimes" suggests, presents the French landscape as less predictable. This stress on variety and the repeated use of the adverb, which Bentley analyzes as a "structure [that is] temporal and in response to changes in the landscape traversed by the train" (Bentley, "A Pre-Raphaelite

Abroad," 37), echoes Rossetti's interest in visual impressions while also acknowledging political awareness, as his vision is characterized by heterogeneity, instability and, at times, even neglect (as echoed by the "unreaped" fields [line 17], the water plots "islanded with growth of reeds" [line 20], the "dregs of water" [line 41]). After a swift look at the coach's occupants and at the sunset, the lyric speaker observes that "a leaden sky, / Hung in blank glare, makes all the country dim, / Which too seems bald and meagre" (lines 36-38). Here, I argue, Rossetti's lyric speaker finds it difficult to restrict his personal impressions of the French country-side to sensorial stimuli, and he is shown gravitating towards a vision of the country as mirroring disarray and poverty, despite possible visual evidence to the contrary. Signs of prosperity are colored by misery, such as in the poem "On the Road," in which even "large stacks of hay" seem "made to look bleak" (lines 54-55). In "Boulogne to Amiens and Paris," the description of the trees "shaken like a press of spears" (line 23), the mentions of the soldiers—the singled-out constant element of the poet's environment ("No priesthood now, but always soldiery" [line 32])—as well as the fear that note-taking might attract the suspicions of a "stout gendarme within the coach" (line 49), unveil a new focus in the lyric speaker's train of thought as he is scanning the landscape: the aftermath of the 1848 revolution and the climate of political and economic uncertainty which, according to the British, was reigning in France. Eventually, the poet's vision of a "bald and meager" (line 38) French landscape is metaphorically linked to the "lank hard-featured soldiery"(line 25) sitting close to him. Political imagery intrudes into the lyric speaker's sensorial investigations in the same way Hunt's fear that "[Rossetti] and [his] note-book may be taken for / The stuff that goes to make an 'emissaire / De la perfide" (which forces him to "abate [his] zeal") (lines 46-48) intrudes on Rossetti's experience both as a recipient of the view offered by the window and a writer of poetry.

However, as the lyric speaker unexpectedly notes that his vision of bleakness might be "truth, / Or [the effect] of the waxing darkness" (38-39), he concedes that, at the core of his poetic, lies a subjectivity of perception potentially not solely influenced by political realities or prejudices, but also by elemental visual factors such as light, color and speed. Rossetti and his lyric speaker have less interest in representing objective reality than appearances would suggest. What his train poems (on both sides on the Belgo-French border) illustrate instead is the artist's interest in exploring the realms of subjective reality, how reality—even when it looks as unmediated as a landscape seen through a train window—might be no more than "a set of illusionist projections" (McGann 102). Through his desire to make subjective reality the focus of his poems (and paintings), Rossetti was participating in the larger discussions taking place at the time on the position of the observer as "active producer of optical experience" (Crary 69). The poet's (but also his reader's) uncertainties as to *how* to look (as much as *what* to look at) and what to perceive as real or metaphorical, exemplifies how "vision," in the nineteenth century, "rather than a privileged form of knowing, [became] itself an object of knowledge, of observation" (McGann 70). Furthermore, by contrasting his vision of the landscape with that of the inside of the train carriage, Rossetti short-circuits the conception of the observer as immobile receptor of visual stimuli in a set-up reminiscent of the camera obscura, and shows instead that, as a tourist, casual observer, and poet, subjectivity is the engine behind both his visions and words. Thus, in "Boulogne to Amiens and Paris," the connection laid out between the physical proximity of gendarmes and soldiers and the fleeting impressions of a landscape exhibiting unrest, while grounded in contemporaneous political realities, is shown to be partly accidental and the work of one of many possible facets of a particular poetic imagination, based on subjective sensorial impressions. As his lyric speaker thus questions his own perceptions, Rossetti does not invite us

to doubt his political awareness (which other poems in the sequence and his letters demonstrate): rather, he unveils that aesthetics are his primary site of experimentation, but also that all actors involved in perception play a central role in the formation of prejudices, political or otherwise. As he subtly shows, metaphors too readily assigned to details of this landscape might as quickly change as his visions from the window change under the effect of the train's rapid movements, a different slant of light, or a change of color. Just as the contributors to *The Germ* refused to use art as a pretext for discussions of the political, Rossetti confirms, in these first poems of *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*, that his concerns are indeed of the aesthetic order, but he is also shown exploring burgeoning concepts about the possible relationships between aesthetics, subjectivity and politics. Despite the banality of their subject matter, these poems do not fail to exhibit political awareness and anticipate the rebellious potential of an aesthetic movement like that of the Brotherhood.

Rossetti's Belgian train poems are also colored by international geopolitics, specifically Britain's decreasing interest in the Low Country in the aftermath of the Spring of Nations. When writing “On the Road” about his crossing of the French-Belgian border, Rossetti records no significant change in the landscape: “Blanc-Misseron, the last French station, passed. / We are in Belgium. It is just the same” (lines 58-59). The tone is half-humorous, as the lack of striking visual changes between the two nations makes geological sense. However, Rossetti eventually does record an ironic difference: the very absence of change. Whereas, in “Boulogne to Amiens and Paris,” the French landscape was continually changing, the Belgian landscape, Rossetti documents in a somewhat exasperated tone, is characterized by inescapable repetitions and monotony: “Curse the miles / of barren chill, - the twentyfold relays! / Curse every beastly Station on the road” (lines 61-62). The use of “sometimes” in “Boulogne to Amiens” is replaced

by “always,” or “for the most part.” Belgium is “always the same” (line 86), it looks as if it was painted “Now by Hans Hemmling and by John Van Eyck” (line 87). Until the sun comes out in the approach of Brussels, “there is small change of country” (line 89).

In order to explore what this different treatment means, one needs to consider each nation's respective position during the 1848 Revolution, and British views on these positions. The late 1840s was a time when British perceptions of Belgium, while positive, were starting to change. From admiration of stability in the midst of Continental turmoils, attitudes to Belgium turned to lack of interest. Ironically, as Francois shows, British political commentators started to recast Belgium's resistance to revolutionary pressures as mere passivity (59); the Belgian population had failed to rebel, they believed, because it did not have the willpower of the French to do so. Belgian stability and predictability became synonymous with stagnation, dullness and political indifference. In ““On the Road,” just as he did when writing about his first impressions of France, Rossetti lists qualities of the landscape which the British political observer could interpret as meaningful metaphors: repetition, homogeneity, predictability. Where the French landscape's seeming heterogeneity could—in a certain light—be read as echoing the country's instability after the revolution, the vision of Belgium's “well-kept” landscape could be seen as going hand in hand with images of political stasis that a majority of Britons associated then with the country.

Belgium's political stability or, to cast it in more negative terms, its lack of political awareness, enabled Rossetti, after Paris and more overtly politically engaged poems such as “Place de la Bastille” to redirect his attention to the original intent of his visit (an immersion in medieval art), but it also became, for a post-Romantic poet like him, symbolic of what was wrong with the young nation: unexciting mercantilism (Belgium, to quote Thackeray in *Vanity*

Fair, was perceived as “a nation of shopkeepers” [282]), political apathy, and lack of cultural innovations. Belgium's stress on a liberal trade-based economy was praised by many British observers who saw the young nation's potential as a close trade partner and stepping stone into Continental markets. However, its focus on trade and reluctance to invest in cultural capital were the same factors which bothered Rossetti about the state of Britain: unlike the average British citizen, members of the Brotherhood strove to see a country collectively invested in culture and the arts, which neither Britain nor Belgium seemed to be. Thus, while Belgium's cultural past was a source of inspiration for Rossetti's aesthetics, its contemporary state was bound to disappoint him. And, indeed, looking at *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* as well as his correspondence, one could hardly describe Rossetti's feelings about Belgium as enthusiastic. His picture of “a Belgian village, - no, a town / Moated and buttressed. Next, a water-track / Lying with draggled reeds in a flat slime” (lines 83-85) in “On the Road” sums up what excites and distresses the poet about Belgium: on the one hand, traces of its medieval past, on the other, symbols of its contemporary stagnancy.

Ormond asserts that “Unlike Charlotte Brontë, who recalled with pleasure her experience of traveling from Ostend to Brussels seven years earlier, Rossetti was indifferent to the Belgian countryside” (159). In this interpretation, the train ride poems, despite being an opportunity to subtly express geopolitical awareness, would become mere fillers, a way for the poet to pass time. However, Rossetti's poems do not record “indifference” as much as recognition of the Belgian landscape's dullness. This recognition, which takes place as the poet is already lamenting the uncomfortable and tiring nature of the train ride, makes for an unpleasant experience. But these dull Belgian landscapes, rather than becoming for the bored travelers mere opportunities for exercises in style or ways to document geopolitical realities, offer Rossetti a chance to

develop themes at the heart of his poetic pursuits. Indeed, while Rossetti's boredom can be connected to the negative stereotype of "dull" Belgium, this very dullness, amplified, as I will show, by the general experience of train travel, becomes poetically enabling. Schivelbusch explained that, ironically, while the technological innovations of train travel were a source of excitement for mid-Victorians, the form taken by these travels was conducive to boredom and somnolence (52-70). Among the most verbal opponents to train travel was John Ruskin, patron of the Pre-Raphaelites, who saw in train velocity an obstacle to the traveler's ability to take in all the details a landscape has to offer.[102] One way in which trains affected the Victorian travel experience, Schivelbush shows, was by forcing a reeducation of perception, as train travelers are disconnected from the sounds and smells of the landscape they observe. Unlike the panoramic representations so popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, train travel reduces the observer's control over his or her modes of perception, particularly the choice of vantage point and the time spent looking at particular details.[103]

In *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*, Rossetti's considers how "the waxing darkness" affects his perception and seems at first exasperated at the repetitive nature of the Belgian landscape as he sees it through the window. However, this feeling of exasperation quickly gives way to an interest in exploring the possibilities (and limitations) of what this "new reality" might offer him as an artist: on the level of poetic practice, these moments enable his lyric speaker to consider the visual as only one sensory perception available and it helps him tune his poetic imagination to other sensory realms. While the overall traveling process, particularly in Belgium, is not

102 See, "I say, first, to be content with as little change as possible … [T]o any person who has all his senses about him, a quiet walk along not more than ten or twelve miles of road a day, is the most amusing of all traveling; and all traveling becomes dull in exact proportion to its rapidity." (Ruskin 370)

103 See, "The traveler saw the objects, landscapes, etc. through the apparatus which moved him through the world. That machine and the motion it created became integrated into his visual perception: thus he could only see things in motion. That mobility of vision – for a traditionally orientated sensorium, such as Ruskin's, an agent for the dissolution of reality – became a prerequisite for the 'normality' of panoramic vision. This vision no longer experienced evanescence: evanescent reality had become the new reality." (Schivelbush 64)

described in the most positive terms, it is one that nevertheless allows Rossetti to find authorial pleasure both in recording striking synesthetic effects[104] and in investigating questions like the subjective experience of time.[105] The uneventfulness of the Belgian scenes as observed by his lyric speaker while traveling between towns, combined with the position of Belgium as a rising industrial nation where the railway system played a central role, also allowed Rossetti, unhindered by political preoccupations, to explore further the Pre-Raphaelites' more general concern with the effects of modernization on artistic endeavor. As Ellizabeth Helsinger explains,

> For Morris and Rossetti, … [acts of aesthetic consciousness] require a particular kind of attention, an open sensory alertness and active imaginative projection that attend to the ordered complexity of poem, picture, or well-designed room. They differentiate, more sharply than did their romantic predecessors, this specifically aesthetic consciousness from that consciousness compelled or demanded by modern urban life with, on the one hand, its barrage of sensory demands (from speed and noise and dirt to competitive advertising and display) and, on the other, its numbingly specialized, concentrated, often repetitive activity. Unlike such alternations between the confusion of sensory "noise" and narrowly focused attention, Pre-Raphaelites pointed out, the attention cultivated by poems and works of art strives to expand receptivity in order to foster unexpected or novel connections (3).

104 See for example, "The darkness is a tumult. We tear on / The roll behind us and the cry before, / Constantly, in a lull of intense speed / And thunder. Any other sound is known / Merely by sight" in "Antwerp to Ghent" (lines 15-19).

105 See, "The country swims with motion. Time itself / Is consciously beside us, and perceived. / Our speed is such the sparks our engine leaves / Are burning after the whole train has passed" in "Antwerp to Ghent" (lines 11-14), or the poet's description of "Strong extreme speed, that the brain hurries with" in "Boulogne to Amiens and Paris" (line 1).

Rossetti's "train" poems constitute almost half of *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*. They demonstrate the artist's attempt, in the midst of both a "barrage of sensory demands" (be they the fleeting images from the train or the loud noises of the machine) and the "numbingly" "repetitive activity" of looking at the landscape, to investigate how an artist can create a work that can "expand receptivity" and "foster unexpected or novel connections." While complaining about his boredom, Rossetti simultaneously opens his readers' eyes to his sensations as a traveler and thought processes as an artist.

The paradox of "dull Belgium" becoming for Rossetti the ideal site for aesthetic exploration expands even further, as his lyric speaker, lamenting the dullness of his surroundings and poverty of the material he encounters, is shown narrating his struggles to turn the latter into poetry. This directly echoes Rossetti's own experience for he worries in his letters that, aside from its paintings, Belgium has offered him very little that is worthy of being written about ("Nothing to write of, and no good in verse" [line 60]). In "Between Ghent and Bruges," his lyric speaker notes, that

> … when a man
>
> … has stuck to his first plan—
>
> Blank verse or sonnets; and as he began
>
> Would end;—why, even the blankest verse may chance
>
> To falter in default of circumstances,
>
> And even the sonnet miss its mystic span.
>
> Trees will be trees, grass grass, pools merely pools … (lines 1, 4-9)

Throughout *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*, Rossetti pretends that writing about Belgium at times becomes an exercise in style, a way to keep himself awake, or worse, to help him fall asleep.[106] The poet's dissatisfaction with the countryside's uneventfulness—whether real or colored by political bias—echoes concerns shared by novelists like Flaubert: is it possible to turn the world, in its dullest, into something worth writing about? When there is no "story," does poetry become an exercise in style or does the absence of a "story" become an opportunity for even more profound aesthetic explorations? Through its use of Belgium, *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* hints at such questions standing at the heart of aesthetes' concerns. While the Belgian landscape's dullness, according to Rossetti, threatens to undermine the form of poetry itself,[107] the eventual failure of this threat (the poems do get written even though there is "Nothing to write of") goes hand in hand with the Aesthetic Movement's belief that art does not always need to privilege content over style and form.

Rossetti's Bruges Experience and "The Staircase of Notre-Dame, Paris"

In order to showcase the meaningfulness of Rossetti's contrasting treatment of France and Belgium (as already illustrated via his train travel poems), I would like to focus on two poems from *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* exhibiting similar structures and themes, "The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris" and "Antwerp to Bruges." The first poem describes the artist's ascension of the French Gothic cathedral, while the second recalls his visit to Antwerp and Bruges three weeks later. In Antwerp, Rossetti climbed to the top of the fourteenth century Cathedral of Our

106 Consider the last lines of "L'Envoi: Brussels. Hotel du Midi:" "I managed to scrawl something, - most of it / Bad, and the sonnet at the close mere slosh. / 'Twas only made because I was knocked up, / And it helped yawning" (lines 9-12).

107 A threat echoed in Rossetti's correspondence: "I have been thinking whether Brussels offers materials for a sonnet, but have come to the conclusion that not even thus much is to be got out of its utter muffishness." (*The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Volume I. 125)

Lady. In Bruges, he marveled at paintings by Memling, and climbed to the top of the thirteenth century belfry. Later that day, he wrote the six-stanza lyric, “The Carillon,” later renamed “Antwerp to Bruges.” This lesser-known poem and the frequently anthologized sonnet “The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris,” both grounded in Rossetti's own visit of the monuments, deal with the ascension of stairs, the effects of the resounding bells on the poet, and the liberatory moment experienced after reaching the top. The short lapse of time separating the two real-life experiences might be enough to account for similarities. Climbing these medieval structures, considering their history and enjoying the scenery was, and still is, a must on the to-do list of most tourists in Paris and Belgium. However, close attention to their differences throws light on Rossetti's awareness of Continental politics and, more importantly, his understanding of suspension of political influence as a necessary premise for aesthetic experience, a pattern which informs his entire poetic sequence.

In “The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris,” France is personified as a wandering visitor of the famous cathedral; the country is in the dark, panting for air but, Rossetti tells us in a reassuring (but not moralistic) tone, there is hope that things will get better:

> As one who, groping in a narrow stair,
> Hath a strong sound of bells upon his ears,
> Which, being at a distance off, appears
> Quite close to him because of the pent air:
> So with this France. She tumbles file and square
> Darkling and without space of breath …
>
> Till she, - having climbed always through the swarm

Of darkness and of hurtling sound – from these

Shall step forth on the light in a still sky. (lines 1-6, 12-14)

The image of the strenuous climbing of the stairs as metaphor for a politically misdirected France, struggling to transcend internal upheaval, finds echoes in “Place de la Bastille” and “On a Handful of French Money.” In the first, beginning where “The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris” ends (with the image of the sky as possible symbol of post-revolutionary hope), the poet seems more concerned by the sufferings of those who used to be imprisoned there than the freedoms gained by the 1789 Revolution. In the second, pondering about the rapid alternation of leaders' effigies on the back of French coins, the poet laments, only a year after the 1848 revolution, how these rapid changes have affected the population.[108] Against the heterogeneity of France's swift changes of regimes and their effects on its population, the average British reader would readily have compared British and, to some extent, Belgian political stability.[109] However, these poems express less a specific indictment by Rossetti of the French regime than general reflections, spurred by his visit to France, on how institutions affect the lives of individuals. So “Place de la Bastille” is concerned with how nation states can abuse power and limit individual freedoms in the name of maintaining order, the setting of “Staircase of Notre Dame” alludes to the dangers of revolutions, while “On a Handful of French Money” hints at the limited effects of regime change on trade. In Rossetti's eyes, all these concerns, be they governmental and religious overreach or the reciprocal influences between government, economics and the individual, were important

108 See, “Even as these coins, so are these lives and years / Mixed and bewildered; yet hath each of them / No less its part in what is come to be / For France. Empire, Republic, Monarchy” (lines 9-12).

109 While “Place de la Bastille” refers explicitly to the 1789 French Revolution, Rossetti's temporal references in “On a Handful of French Money” and “The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris” are less clear. Boos excluded the latter poem from her investigation of “political sonnets,” as she saw it “celebrat[ing] historical events preceding the French Revolution” (258). Given the political backdrop of Rossetti's visit, the situation described in “The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris” while applicable to the 1789 Revolution, inevitably had to also be written with the more recent 1848 Revolution in mind.

topics on both sides of the Channel. In Britain and in the eyes of members of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, they threatened to obfuscate the need for artistic change.

In “The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris” the lyric speaker, embodying France, is disoriented, breathless. He is surrounded by the real, deafening sound of the carillon (“a strong sound of bells upon his ears” [line 2]) as well as the metaphorical “hurtling sound” (line 13) of the revolutionary “thunder” (line 7) and “storm” (line 9) threatening to destabilize the nation. To the physical discomfort while ascending the monument corresponds a vision of contemporary France as politically misdirected, unstable, and chaotic.[110] Ultimately, the tone of the poem is meant to reassure Rossetti's British readers, as the menacing storm, while possessing the potential to spread to other nations (“wasteth other countries ere it die” [line 11]), is described “spent in rain upon the unscathed seas” (line 10) that is, never making it to the other side of the Channel—a direct reference to the Spring of Nations' limited effects on Britain. Rossetti, despite a latent Francophobia exhibited elsewhere in the sequence and in his letters, still believes that France might one day “step forth on the light in a still sky” (line 14). But this note of hope, confined to the last line, does not constitute the focus of the poem, and France's ability to see an end to its troubles remains a vision of the future (“shall step” [line 14]). By ending the poem with such ambiguous moderation, Rossetti reestablishes his position, as is customary throughout *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*, as a poet refusing to be ultimately read as a political commentator. While the poem acknowledges French politics, it simultaneously undermines any attempt at being read as the expression of either disapprobation or support. Rossetti, while enabling a

110 The poem's focus on the strenuous ascension instead of the view is not grounded in biographical evidence. In a letter to William Michael, Rossetti explains how, after “hurr[iedly” climbing the stairs of the “inconceivably stunning” cathedral, he and Hunt “had a most glorious view of Paris & shouted in the spirit.” (*The Correspondance of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Volume I. 108). Rossetti admits that “while climbing, a sonnet came whole into my head, which however I have almost forgotten … I am trying constantly to remember it, & will copy it in my next note if I succeed” - which he does, in the form of “The Staircase of Notre Dames, Paris.” One can see in Rossetti's delayed writing of the sonnet, back at his hotel, a reason for its more thought-out metaphorical dimension, as well as, after the facts, the decision to minimize the euphoric impact that reaching the top had had on both artists.

political reading, manages, through open-endedness, to present the sensory effects of ascending the monument (also at the crux of "Antwerp to Bruges") as of equal importance, and thus gives the aesthetic experience priority over a political commentary.

At first, "Antwerp to Bruges," published in *The Germ* in March 1850, seems to adhere even more firmly to the apolitical, exclusively aesthetic agenda required by Rossetti for publications in the journal. As already observed, however, Rossetti's unwillingness to dwell on politics while in Belgium does not mean that all political meaning has been expunged from these poems. In fact, Rossetti's unwillingness to tackle politics explicitly when dealing with his Belgian subject(s), once contrasted with his tackling of politically-charged French subject(s), paradoxically still showcases political awareness alongside the belief in maintaining distance between politics and art. While the sonnet "A Staircase to Notre Dame" and the lyric "Antwerp to Bruges" describe a similar physical process, the ascensions of Antwerp's cathedral and Bruges's belfry differ from that described in "The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris." The climb is described succinctly ("I climbed the stair in Antwerp church" [line 1] and "I climbed at Bruges all the flight / The belfry had of ancient stones." [lines 19-20]). To the hazardous, physically taxing ascension of Notre Dame is opposed the seemingly painless climbing of the Belgian stairs. To the auditory discomfort caused by the French bells is contrasted "the circling thews of sound" (line 2) of Antwerp's bells, their "music" tactfully "keep[ing] pause" and starting again "through the silent place" (lines 11-12) Far from deafening, these bells, "strik[ing] [the poet's] ears" (lines 16-17) bring him the physical comfort, through ears and touch, of feeling closer to the old masters. There, "the light in a still sky," a vision of the future in "The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris" (line 14) is already accessible ("the sky was white" [line 22]), and the "thunder"

and “storm” are nonexistent. The “east wind,” which the poet sees blown “for leagues” (line 21) at the top of the belfry offers little threat to him or the landscape.

This contrast between the loud, overwhelming ascension of the French Cathedral and the swift, unproblematic one of the Belgian landmarks echoes once more a contemporary British perception of the political differences between “unstable” France and “peaceful” Belgium. Rossetti is aware of these differences and, as I will show below, subtly acknowledges them. But just as “A Staircase to Notre Dame, Paris” resists taking a clear position on the Revolution, “Antwerp to Bruges,” resists presenting a clearly positive or negative stance. The effect of this resistance enables Rossetti to refer to political background not as an end in itself (or the end of poetry), but as one element among others that is as subjective as the aesthetic experiences taking place in these historical locations. However, the apolitical and historically frozen Belgian landscape helps Rossetti to recenter more firmly his lyric speaker’s focus in the realm of his pre-Raphaelite aesthetic pursuits. Rossetti's ascension of Notre Dame does not satisfy his hunger for the medieval because, in France, his aesthetic purpose is marred by a contemporary environment constantly reminding him of the country's post-revolutionary political situation, even in such an isolated place as the Cathedral's tower. The cathedral's deafening bells stand for the forces of chaos that have swept over the French nation and, as such, their overwhelming noise—the intensity of which assaults rather than liberates the senses—also warns of the potential danger of letting the political intrude on the aesthetic.It might appear that Belgium offers a form of apolitical canvas on which Rossetti is able to peacefully project his historical and aesthetic fantasies. “Antwerp to Bruges” directly echoes what Francois sees as a form of “Belgian stability … frequently described by the British observers with the instability of Paris” (58). Surely, the difference between the two poems reflects the stability of Belgium's constitutional monarchy,

one which contemporary British political commentators praised. However, while Rossetti might express a favorable bias towards Belgium because of its cultural heritage, the political stability of the country really matters to him only insofar as it provides fewer distractions from aesthetic ruminations. It is worth noting that the shorter poem "Antwerp to Bruges," published decades after *A trip to Paris and Belgium*, is based on Rossetti' longer poem originally titled "The Carillon." The latter describes the lyric speaker's arrival, by train, at the city of Antwerp and his visit to the Cathedral; he is then shown walking along the river Scheldt, arriving by train at Bruges, ascending the belfry and conveying his impressions once at its top. In his introduction to the 1901 reprint of the four issues of *The Germ*, William Michael nonchalantly pointed out that the "only important change" between the version of "The Carillon" written during Rossetti's travel and published in *The Germ* and the version reproduced in the *Collected Works* (1886) was the omission of two stanzas (the first and fourth) (William M. Rossetti, *The Germ,* 24). I want to argue that the cuts, which led to the shortened version that appears in anthologies today,[111] are indicative of where Rossetti ultimately wanted the focus of his poem to be, but they also tell us a lot about his approach to his Belgian environment.[112] The first missing stanza is a description of the poet's slow arrival at the Antwerp train station:

> At Antwerp, there is a low wall
> Binding the city, and a moat
> Beneath, that the wind keeps afloat.
> You pass the gates in a slow drawl
> Of wheels. If it is warm at all

111 Consider, for example, Rossetti, *Collected Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Jerome McGann.
112 Ronnalie Howard, in her analysis of "Antwerp to Bruges," offers an insightful reading of the poem's discontinuity, linking it to the lyric speaker's own feelings of discontinuity and disjunction. Registering, as I do in this chapter, the problematic temporal and geographical jumps in the poem, her analysis is however based on the shortened version of the poem and does not take into account the two excised stanzas.

The Carillon will give you thought. (lines 1-6)

The second depicts the arrival in the town of Bruges:

At Bruges, when you leave the train,

– A singing numbness in your ears, –

The Carillon's first sound appears

Only the inner moil. Again

A little minute though – your brain

Takes quiet, and the whole sense hears. (lines 19-24)

Like other sections of *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*, these two stanzas document Rossetti's visual impressions in the act of traveling, his locations—in particular through reminders of their medieval pasts ("low wall," "moats," "gates," "carillon")—and his modes of transportation. Synesthesia ("wind." "warm," "Carillon") and a reflection on time ("slow drawl") indicate once more the lyric speaker's openness to multiple modes of perception. As was the case with his arrival in Paris and Brussels, he stresses his need for a form of acclimatization from the jostling, noisy motions of the steam train to the apparently quieter (and quainter) life of these old towns. Both in Antwerp and in Bruges, the buzzing, mechanical sounds of the train ride are contrasted to the melody of the medieval Carillon, almost as a call, a reminder to Rossetti of the purpose of his visit: coming face-to-face with the works of Flemish masters in an attempt to revitalize British art. The "singing numbness" of modernity (symbolized by the steam train) gives way to another kind of song, one that gradually reawakens the poet's senses ("your brain takes quiet, and the whole sense hears" [line 24]). As such, this "numbness" is also symbolic of the state of contemporary art in Britain, dislodged, as Rossetti views it, from the lives of modern men by society's focus on trade and mechanization.

By cutting out these two stanzas, a decision validated by William Michael when the poem was republished, Rossetti draws the focus on his experience when visiting the top of these two exemplars of Flemish architecture. This removal deprives the audience of a clearly-marked sense of location, particularly between stanzas 2 and 3 of the abridged version. From the top of Antwerp's Cathedral, the poem abruptly jumps to the poet's experience of Bruges, its carillon and view. The two removed stanzas both start with a clear marker of location ("At Antwerp," "At Bruges"), offer clear indications of the poet's modes of transportation, as well as of his feelings (emotional and physical) after taking the train. By contrast, in the shorter version of the poem, there is no mention of an "in-between" in relation to time or space. A residual marker of this lack finds echo in Rossetti's change of the poem's title from "The Carillon (Antwerp and Bruges)" (for the longer version) to simply "Antwerp to Bruges" (for the shorter version). The "Carillon," which becomes the focus of the shorter poem, is dropped from its title as there is no more need to secure the reader's awareness of its thematic centrality. The effect of this additional cut is that the poem's title puts forward the name of two cities which we do not see Rossetti approaching or leaving and which, because their respective Carillons seem to entice similar experiences, become interchangeable. The change from "Antwerp *and* Bruges" to "Antwerp *to* Bruges" (emphasis mine) is also meaningful since what has been excised from the poem is precisely the geographical and temporal bridge between the two cities.

Rossetti's cuts and changes go hand in hand with an artistic agenda that aims at minimizing the geographic and historical situatedness of experience in favor of an investigation of the sensory and sensual nature of the experiences themselves. So the shorter poem becomes willfully crafted to minimize its geographical reference (Flanders in late 1849) and maximize its effect as the description of intense aesthetic experience. It loses the pretense—which, in a realist

narrative, would have been an obligation—of needing to take its readers on a journey made of a logical succession of clear geographical and temporal markers. Furthermore, these gaps disorientate readers, forcing them to stop viewing the poem as a random event within a linear travel narrative, to consider it outside of historical and geographical situatedness in order to better apprehend its importance in the realm of the personal and the aesthetic. The new version avoids references to intermediary spaces between the two locations in a way that further reinforces another avoidance, that of having to deal with the reality of the towns down below. In this shortened version, as in much of the whole sequence of Rossetti's poems, the poet is not particularly interested in considering these moments—however inescapable when traveling—of mingling with the local population. By swiftly starting the poem with a lyric speaker "climb[ing] the stairs in Antwerp church" (line 1), Rossetti expresses indifference to what happened between the train ride and the visit to the Cathedral's top (an indifference that his letters further elaborate), but he also presents an escape to a form of solitude as something necessary and enjoyable, as it encourages higher, loftier thoughts. The poem articulates a sharp contrast between the isolated haven constituted at the top of these medieval structures and the busy, noisy crowds below.[113]

In the second stanza, Rossetti contrasts the space "far up" where the "carillon did search the wind" (line 4-5) to the space "far under," where "birds came to perch" (line 5-6). Even when looking down, the poet chooses to focus only on "gables" and "birds," not human forms. The third stanza, while dealing with a moment of his visit "far under," reinforces the longed-for disconnect between poet and local population. Here, Rossetti ponders about "the flow" as he "stood along" "the Scheldt" "in Antwerp harbour" (lines 7-10). Just as the poet seemed magically transported from Antwerp to Bruges, he is taken from the top of the cathedral directly

113 This finds an echo in Rossetti's letters, in which he expresses his lack of interest in everyday Parisians: "Hunt and I begin to like Paris immensely," followed, as an afterthought, by "- the city itself, I mean." (*The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Volume I. 109)

to Antwerp's harbor in “a certain space of night” (lines 8-9) (even though the two places are a block away from each other). There, the harbor is empty and “the flow,” “heard and felt” (line 10), is not a flow of people, but of water. This emptied space, sought out by the poet, is another version of the cathedral's top, the presence of which makes itself felt by its “carillon [that] kept pause, and dwelt in music through the silent place” (lines 11-12).

The third stanza of the shortened version abruptly transports us to Bruges, and further exhibits how Rossetti's lyric speaker finds in Belgium a space where elements referring to contemporaneous matters such as politics or economics, while present, can be more easily tuned out in favor of an exploration of aesthetic experience. As if to stress his differentiated appreciation of old and contemporary Belgium, the poet simply declares, “John Memmeling and John van Eyck / Hold state at Bruges” (lines 13-14)—the city's greatest quality, in the painter's eyes, is its connection to its past. The two last stanzas echo the first as they take place in a similar location (the top of a medieval monument, where a carillon is heard), but they go on to describe the poet's spiritual experience. Rossetti comments, “I scanned the works that keep their name” (line 15) and makes clear that visiting the local museums was the driving purpose of his trip.

In Antwerp, the carillon reawakened the poet's senses after a mind-numbing train ride. In Bruges, it serves even more clearly as an intellectual, temporal and sensual catalyst for thinking about the past:

> The carillon, which then did strike
> Mine ears, was heard of theirs alike;
> It set me closer unto them. …
> I stood so near upon the height
> That my flesh felt the carillon. (lines 16-18, 23-24)

Rossetti's lyric speaker describes a moment when, in the isolation of the Belfry's top, not only the carillon "strike[s] [his] ears" but his "flesh" feels (or is imagined to feel) its surface. It is, as Howard explains, a moment when "the speaker's sense of contrast and of shame when he views the paintings of Memmeling and John Van Eyck is eased" (7). As he feels "the east wind" and while "the earth [is] grey" and "the sky [is] white" (lines 21-22), the city below (at least evoked in the Antwerp section by the mention of its "gables") is not acknowledged at all anymore. Standing on top of all that the Belfry has of "ancient stone" (line 19), the lyric speaker, "so near upon the height" (line 23), imagines himself in a heaven-like, atemporal space where, he unveils, his auditory and tactile experiences can set him closer to the Flemish painters he admires than any museum visit ever will. In a synesthetic moment where a remotely-activated, paradoxically immaterial tactile impression and sound intertwine, the carillon's strong vibrations, carried over to the building's old stones, give the lyric speaker the impression of remotely "feel[ing]" the instrument. The experience reflects on the catalytic nature of the Belgian carillon: considered for its effects rather than its nature as a tangible object, the instrument, sounding then as it did hundreds of years before and traveling through sound waves through both the "ancient stone[s]" (line 20) and the poet's body itself, also intangibly makes the passing of time suddenly appear inconsequential. It powerfully affects the poet, suddenly physically shaken by its vibrations and intellectually awakened by what Bentley describes an "epiphanic moment of transcendence" (51). This epiphany is not religious in the strict sense of the term, but artistic.[114]

114 Note Rossetti's own description of his aesthetic philosophy as "art-Catholic," that is, meant to "suggest a deep indwelling significance in things" or just "any meaning or mystery beyond the apparent surfaces of things" As will become apparent in his career, "For Rossetti … Art was far more important than Christianity. In fact, a crucial feature of emergent Pre-Raphaelitism was the supplementing or supplanting of Christian faith with a faith in the power of art." (Riede, "The Pre-Raphaelite School." 306-307, 308)

Belgium's ghosts of the past and museums – Rossetti compared to Longfellow and Gautier

"Antwerp to Bruges," in its interest in personal, epiphanic moments of sensory experience resonates deeply with Rossetti's burgeoning pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, but it had a poetic precedent. On October 24, 1849, Rossetti, still in Bruges, sent an early version of "Antwerp to Bruges" to the painter James Collinson and noted in his letter, "The song is, of course, quite original; there is in particular a Yankee of the name of Longfellow with whose works it has no affinity." The work Rossetti alluded to was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's two-poem sequence, "Carillon" and "The Belfry of Bruges," written during his 1842 trip to Bruges and published in 1845. Rossetti's comment needs to be read simultaneously as a humorous, fake denial of Longfellow's influence (or, at least, an indirect recognition of how similar the poems might look to an outsider) and as a more serious hint that Rossetti did intend to have his poem diverge in several ways from this earlier counterpart. While they describe a similar situational, auditory and visionary experience, these poems diverge in their artistic purpose. Comparing the poems helps shed more light on Rossetti's intentions, in particular in regards to the effects such epiphanic moment can have on the artist, and their permanence.

Longfellow's Bruges poems were influenced by Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" (1842), with which they share stylistic as well as structural similarities.[115] Both Rossetti's and Longfellow's poems stress the role of the carillon as a mediator between the world of everyday Belgium and that of its past as imagined by the poets. In the beginning of "Belfry of Bruges," the poet muses,

At my feet the city slumbered. From its chimneys, here and there,

115 "The Belfry of Bruges" emulates "the Locksley Hall couplet" (See Stephen), also known as "the old 'fifteener' line" (Priestley 512), a form allowing for "the speaker's passionate overflow into a fantastical realm" (Naous 42). While the tone in "The Belfry of Bruges" is less tormented, its lyric speaker, like Tennyson's, similarly seeks isolation in a landmark of the past to take pause from his current life and lets his imagination run wild. While, in "Locksley Hall," the sound of the bugle-horn awakens the soldier from his reverie and spurs him to join his fellow soldiers, the (equally military) sound of the drum reminds Longfellow's lyric speaker that it is time to leave the Belfry and mingle with the crowd again.

Wreath of snow-white smoke ascending, vanished, ghost-like, into air.

Not a sound rose from the city at that early morning hour,

But I heard a heart of iron beating in the ancient tower.

From their nests beneath the rafters sang the swallows wild and high;

And the world, beneath me sleeping, seemed more distant than the sky.

Then most musical and solemn, bringing back the olden times,

With their strange, unearthly changes rang the melancholy chimes …

Visions of the days departed, shadowy phantoms filled my brain;

They who live in history only seemed to walk the earth again … (lines 7-14, 17-18)

Then follows a long list of historical figures and events (related to Bruges, Flanders and Belgium as a whole) as they take shape in the poet's imagination. Like Rossetti, Longfellow presents disassociation from his contemporary Continental surrounding and escaping to the top of the "ancient tower" as enabling a visionary experience of the past. While Rossetti's lyric speaker ignores the local population, Longfellow, with similar results, sets his poem at a time of day when the streets would be almost empty.[116] Like Rossetti's, Longfellow's lyric speaker prefers to think of contemporary Belgians as "more distant than the sky" (line 12). The more concrete signs of contemporary life, like the "snow-white smoke" escaping the chimneys, while acknowledged at first, gradually come to spur the poet's disconnection: they "vanished" after "ascending," then become "ghost-like" (line 8), anticipating the visions to come. Instead, the poet ponders on the birds nesting high and, in a visionary trance spurred by the sound of the carillon imagines images of a past appearing paradoxically more concrete than the "ghost-like" world down below. At this point of the poem, the carillon is for Longfellow, as it is for Rossetti, an intellectual and sensual

116 A similar "muting" of the city below takes place in Longfellow's own "Carillon" poem when, listening to the medieval chimes in the comfort of his inn's bed, the lyric speaker muses on how, "from out the silent heaven, / Silence on the town descended. / Silence, silence everywhere. / On the earth and in the air" (lines 14-17).

entry point to the past.[117] To a man born in a young nation such as America, Bruges, its medieval streets and carillon, all represented a vivifying, inspiring entry into the quaint and sentimentalized world of "old" Europe. "The Belfry of Bruges," by emulating "Locksley Hall," exemplifies Longfellow's difficulty resisting the influence of Britain's "best" (both stylistically and thematically) when trying to establish new poetic trends in the then still young American nation. His poem is derivative in style and nostalgic in contents, and looks at "old Europe" for inspiration for both. Interestingly, Longfellow's choice of medieval Belgium (rather than Italy, for example) as travel destination and subject of his poems also shows how much Belgium was on the tourist map—not just across the Channel but also across the Atlantic—when Anglo-Americans attempted to connect and (re)imagine Europe's sentimental past.

Rossetti's "Antwerp to Bruges" diverges from Longfellow's sequence (and from "Locksley Hall") in that Longfellow's lyric speaker is eventually aroused from his reveries in a way that forces him to socialize again with others. In Longfellow, this takes the form of recognizing the presence of contemporary locals:

> Then the sound of drums aroused me. The awakened city's roar
> Chased the phantoms I had summoned back into their graves once more.
> Hours had passed away like minutes; and, before I was aware,
> Lo! the shadow of the belfry crossed the sun-illumined square. (lines 37-40)

Just as Rossetti's lyric speaker is shown occasionally experiencing a suspension of time (be it when he dozes in the train or daydreams at the top of the belfry), Longfellow's lyric speaker comments on the subjective experience of time passing after he loses track of time in more ways

117 Note Longfellow's 1842 diary entry on his first evening in Bruges, "It was not yet night; and I strolled through the fine old streets and *felt myself a hundred years old*. The chimes seemed to be ringing incessantly; and the air of repose and antiquity was delightful" (Rice 28, emphasis mine).

than one (“hours,” but also, one might argue, centuries, “had passed away like minutes” [line 39]). The “sound of drums” below (line 37), coming from a fanfare or a procession, eventually collides with the images of a medieval past summoned earlier by the sound of the carillon. By ending with the allusion to Bruges's square, the city's commercial heart, and the “roar”-like sound of its morning hustle and bustle, Longfellow goes full circle with the first line of the poem (“In the market-place of Bruges stands the belfry old and brown” [line 1]), and presents the poet's mental escapade as an episode with clear temporal boundaries. While the past can be summoned by the material, contemporary presence of old stones belonging to the medieval times, its influence on the present is elusive. The Romantic quaintness it evokes is contrasted with the image of a town contemporaneously bent on commerce. Thus the poem documents the American need to consider the old European models for intellectual revitalization but also simultaneously ends with the observation that, eventually, “business” needs to prevail again.

Rossetti's poem significantly diverges from Longfellow's in its unwillingness to view the music and effects of the carillon on the lyric speaker as a mere poetic interlude. “Antwerp to Bruges,” by ending abruptly with the aforementioned synesthetic connection between the poet and the carillon, purposefully keeps the moment of aesthetic revelation, far from the crowd below, in a state of infinite suspension. By letting “the phantoms [he] had summoned” be “chased … back into their graves once more” by the city's “roar” (line 37-38), Longfellow admits the discrepancy (and incompatibility) between both worlds. In comparison, Rossetti, through non-closure, forces his readers to further ponder a sensual aesthetic experience, one that is powerful enough not to be clouded by politics or economics, but also one which, because of its ability to linger, the reader is invited to see as a potentially influential force in the present and into the future. This state of suspension throws light on how Rossetti approaches the Belgian

past. To him, Belgium is not a mere referent for a set of romanticized images which, as in Longfellow's poem, can randomly be summoned to only temporarily revitalize the poet's imagination but eventually clash with contemporary experience. For Rossetti, this past extends into the present as it creates opportunities for contemporary subjective sensual experiences that go beyond mere passing nostalgia and that can themselves affect, in contents and form, contemporary artistic productions.

My second comparative study involves French author Theophile Gautier. On July 22 1836, a decade before Rossetti and Hunt, Gautier and Gérard de Nerval embarked on a similar cultural journey through Belgium,[118] which Gautier then later described in *Caprices et Zigzags*[119] (1845), a prose travel narrative dealing with Belgium before the 1848 February Revolution. The disparities and similarities between the two works testify to the multiple uses authors of different national affiliations could make of Belgium in the framework of their own aesthetic concerns. From the first paragraph of *Caprices et Zigzags*, Gautier explains that Belgium's political, industrial, and economic matters would be off the table: "I ought to warn the universe that it will not find in these pages lofty political considerations, nor theories on trains, nor complaints about counterfeited products"[120] (1). This is a surprising move since *Caprices et Zigzags* promises from the get-go to avoid the kind of quasi-sociological analysis many readers would have expected of a prose travel narrative at the time. The premise of Gautier's trips (a scholarly interest in the art of seventeenth century painter Paul Rubens, to which I will come back), leads him, as will be the case for Rossetti, to a similarly aestheticized vision of the country and focus on its past. Gautier,

118 For detailed background on Gautier's 1836 Belgian trip, see Van der Tuin.
119 The Belgian section of which was published in episodic form in 1836 issues of *Chronique de Paris* under the title *Un Tour en Belgique.*
120 All translations from French are mine. The "trains" are a reference to Belgium's industrialization (Gautier describes the country as "a true industrial Eldorado"), the "counterfeited products" refers to the country's still inadequate regulations concerning copyrights of French novels.

Merollo explains, is simply "not in a state where he can tolerate the violence of the real if it is not filtered by an artistic lens of his choice, or through the memory of some distant past" (34). In other words, whereas Rossetti sees in a turn to medievalism an opportunity to revitalize (and question) artistic practices of the present in ways that could extend—but not be subordinated—to a conversation about contemporary political practices, Gautier adopts a much more openly escapist attitude from contemporary political realities. Belgium becomes in Gautier's eyes a form of *tableau vivant*. Nearing the border, and letting his perception of the Flemish-speaking northern part of France be colored by its proximity to Belgium, Gautier notes, in a language full of pictorial metaphors,

> Once we had passed Cambrai, the country-side's appearance looked like nothing I had seen before; you could tell that the North was approaching, and you could feel on your face whiffs of its ice-cold breath. … I have never seen anything more graceful and refreshing as *the picture that was unveiled before my eyes* as I left this old ugly city, all black and smoky from coal. The sky had pale blue *hues* that turned into *bright* lilacs as it got closer to the area of pink *sparkles* which were suspended between the sun and the horizon. … [The sky] looked like one of *Turner's most crystaline aquamarines*. ... As the wagon moved on, the view broadened, new *perspectives* opened. (23-24, emphasis mine)

While Gautier uses the more contemporary J.W.M Turner as point of reference, Rossetti, as we have seen, chooses older points of reference, Memling and Van Eyck, in equally pictorial descriptions. If Gautier, like Rossetti, notices little change between France and Belgium at first,[121] the visually poetic quality of the landscape later becomes gradually contrasted with the

121 Just like Rossetti comments, "We are in Belgium. It is just the same" (line 59) in "On the Road," Gautier notes when crossing the border, "We were not in France anymore. I was particularly surprised not to experience a more

disappointing, crass reality of its inhabitants. Lost in a highly-fantasied vision involving "the misty shape of a mysterious blonde girl, turning her head to the sound of galloping horses, or bending over her delicate spinning wheel," the French author suddenly checks himself, faced as he is with "nasty creatures with sun-burnt faces, as if they had fought all across Africa, so ugly that even the youngest ones look like they are sixty" (26).[122] This leads him to conclude that "Man is almost always an unwanted addition, and human figures are almost never as beautiful as a landscape" (27). However, even the medieval-inspired structures he encounters disappoint him. As he nears the French Flemish-speaking region, he stresses the increasing presence of fortified towns such as those belonging to the Vauban network, and just as the Flemish country girls do not match his romanticized expectations, neither do these towns: the town was "the ugliest and saddest thing one can imagine … I want dungeons, round and square towers, multiple fortifications, arrow loops, peepholes, drawbridges, portcullises and all those things found in old fortresses" (21-22). What Gautier reacts against here is what he sees as a failed attempt to copy the medieval—the very large French Vauban structures, designed by French eighteenth century military engineer Sébastien Le Pestre de Vauban, were not the works of medieval architects, but later urban-military structures trying to emulate them while exhibiting the latest trends in military protection. They disappoint Gautier because, like the Belgian girls he encounters and anachronistically fantasizes to be Rubens' inspirations, they firmly belong to the contemporary realm. It takes a visit through Brussels for Gautier to experience a moment of aesthetic pleasure akin that of Rossetti at the top of Bruges' Belfry:

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violent sensation. … I … believed that a border had to be marked by little dots of blue or red lights, just like the ones one sees in geography manuals; in that respect, too, I was wrong" (32). Gautier's comment, while humorous, recognizes the futility of expecting Belgium to be vastly different from France. Less than two decades after the Belgian Revolution and the not-so-distant memory of Napoleonic occupation, Gautier confirms that, to the French, Belgium might as well have been an extension of his homeland.

122 Rossetti similarly underlines his disappointment in the physical appearance of the local women when he describes, in "On the Road," "A vile mummy with a bag / Is squatted next to me: a disgusting girl / Broad opposite" (lines 67-69).

> [W]e suddenly arrived on the Place de l'Hotel de Ville, which gave me the most intense surprise in the whole trip. I felt like I was stepping into another era, and that the ghost of the Middle-Ages were suddenly standing in front of me. I thought such illusions were only to be found in dioramas or English engravings. (48)

For the French Gautier in 1836 as for the British Rossetti more than a decade later, the climactic moment of the artist's trip in Belgium depends on occlusion, be it physical or imaginary, of its contemporaneity. The moment does not last long, as it is marred by Gautier's further visions of the locals, whom, unlike Rossetti, he still desperately attempts to cast as aesthetic objects—an attempt that is shown as bound to fail. Gautier's disappointment is the result of an amateur ethnographic approach in which the local population never fits the author's idealized expectations. His decision to place the value of the landscape over that of the people reveals an unwillingness to deal with contemporary Belgians: while he makes a point of distancing himself from the elitist and insular Parisian culture, Gautier cannot help but find Belgium provincial. This unwillingness, I argue, is of a different nature than Rossetti's. Whenever the latter expresses disappointment or annoyance towards Belgians and the French, he rarely denigrates them in essentialist terms but rather as embodying beliefs or institutions which he would find problematic on either side of the Channel: the haggard soldiers, the needlessly overzealous customs officials and policemen, the pompous museum guides.

Rossetti's treatment of the latter and the institution they represent in *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* is particularly interesting, as it deals, as I will show below, with a dimension of contemporary life that bridges both aesthetic and political concerns. A striking echo between Gautier's and Rossetti's Belgian journeys lies in the reasons that spurred them. In his

introduction, Gautier addresses the question of an imaginary French reader doubting the appeal of visiting the neighboring country:

> Now, if the curious reader desires to know the reason why I decided to visit Belgium rather than any other place, I will gladly share it … The idea of going to Belgium came to me in the Museum, as I was wandering in the section dedicated to Rubens. The sight of these voluptuous, beautiful women, these healthy bodies, these massive mountains of pink flesh and their cascades of golden hair, had awakened in me the desire to meet the real types. (2)

Thus Gautier left Belgium presumably following an artistic quest,[123] and just like Rossetti's enthusiasm for the paintings of Van Eyck and Memling at the Le Louvre heavily colors the British poet's Belgian visit, so does Gautier's admiration of Rubens. Gautier presents interest in art as a primary justification for the trip—following the common perception shared by members of both nations that contemporary Belgium would otherwise be of little interest. It is Ruben's voluptuous women whom Gautier seeks (but fails) to find in his elusive visions of Belgian "mysterious blonde girl[s]" mentioned above. His failure to "meet the real types" stems from his unrealistic conflation of past and present Belgium. Unlike Rossetti, who manages, in a poem like "Antwerp to Bruges," to bridge the two in a timeless, epiphanic experience, Gautier just finds himself in a frustrating impasse.

Gautier's aesthetic approach and sensibility differ from Rossetti's in that the baroque works of Rubens, the primary reason for his trip, are heavily criticized in Rossetti's letters and poems about Belgium. In nineteenth century Britain, Rubens was synonymous with the "cultural

123 More precisely, a response to his visit of the largest collection of paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, the Medici Gallery at The Louvre.

decadence" of the continent.[124] The increasing British rejection of the Belgian artist throughout the nineteenth century (John Ruskin comes to mind) was conversely matched by an increasing French appreciation, and the critical debate over the quality of his works was regularly used to exemplify how differences in aesthetic taste could mirror differences in national identities. As a result, admiring or rejecting his work often meant taking not only an aesthetic, but also a patriotic stance. Gautier's admiration of Rubens exemplified what Rossetti considered wrong about the art valued in France: the "fleshiness" and public display of sensuality of Rubens' women clashed with Rossetti's belief in artistic expressions of a form of sensuality that remains allusive and mysterious.[125] To be clear, Rossetti, unlike Hunt, was far from exhibiting prudishness. In many ways, the excessive sensuality and "fleshiness" of Rubens' subjects, I argue, mirrors for Rossetti the dangers of sensory overload (be it caused by train travel as in "The Carillon," or the sound of French bells in "The Staircase of Notre Dame, Paris"). While, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, Rossetti's lyric speaker does take pleasure in investigating the value of experiencing his environment through a variety of sensations, an overabundance of the latter, which makes the artist numb, overwhelmed, and unable to cater to details, paradoxically threatens to undermine the quality of the aesthetic experience just as much as a strong politicization of its understanding.

The importance of museum-going as the purpose behind Rossetti and Hunt's decision to leave for Belgium in the Fall of 1849 is echoed in two ways in Rossetti's poetic work. The first, of course, involves the ekphrastic poems that resulted from his visit. The second comes in the

124 See Demoor (106). While showing that Henry James' gradual rejection of Rubens from 1869 onwards went together with his desire to fit into English cultural society, Demoor notes his acquaintance, that year, with Rossetti and his circle. James and the Italo-British painter had a lot in common when it came to their wish to assert their Britishness; one way to do so was through criticism of the Belgian painter and, by extension, his home country.
125 Rossetti's very negative reaction to the women of the French "Can-Can at Valentino's," for example, has less to do with nationalistic pride than with the directness of sensual exhibition, the lack of mystery. As if to fill that lack, Rossetti feels the need to project (unsuccessfully) symbolic attributes to the dancers of the latter poem: "a cross," "a beast" (line 2), a "Chimera," a "Sphinx" (line 5). The obscenity of the scene, however, undermines his attempts.

form of *A Trip to Paris and Belgium*'s poem "Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Antwerp)," in which he describes his experience of a Belgian museum. In *Caprices et Zigzags*, Gautier hopes to get a glimpse of a "Rubens without a frame" (39) but is met with disappointment, not only because of the clash between his artistic expectations and contemporary Belgian reality, but also, more generally, because he finds it difficult to find pleasure in objects placed outside of an aestheticizing project ("without a frame"). In Antwerp, Rossetti's lyric speaker, on the other hand, is shown facing the actual works of the baroque painter. The main focus of the poem, however, is the lyric speaker's annoyance at the ceremony around the guided tour and, more generally, the pomp surrounding Belgian admiration for Rubens as an artist (as embodied by the guide): sculptures, "monument[s]" (line 11) and other types of "bust[s]" (line 5) celebrating him abound and, interestingly, hinder a proper visit of the art itself ("held us at bay" [line 5]), there are "miles [of paintings] within the wall within" (line 6) the museum, and "his chair," conserved "in a glass case"[126] (line 8), and the Belgian artist is described as no less than "le Dieu des peintres" ("the God of painters") by the tour guide (line 1). Rossetti is not only annoyed by what he perceives as the lack of artistry in Rubens' productions ("slosh" [line 6]), but also the cult of celebrity surrounding him. More importantly, Rossetti mocks the (misguided) choices made by the museum as a national art institute. His attack, in light of the pre-Raphaelite movement's own rejection of academic art in Britain, is to be understood as also directed against British art institutions in general, the representatives of academic art, and their own forms of misguided subjectivity and idolatry. While Rossetti does spend some time commenting on his museum visits in letters, it is telling that, when it comes to medieval and early-Renaissance artists, he merely glosses over the experience in his poetic sequence: "John Memmeling and John van Eyck

126 A form of quasi-religious shrine uncoincidentally reminiscent of those described in the preceding poem "Returning to Brussels."

/ Hold state at Bruges. In sore shame / I scanned the works that keep their name" (13-15), he notes in "Antwerp to Bruges." Several elements might account for this "shame." On the one hand, one could interpret it as the result of a difficult confrontation of a still rather inexperienced young artist with the mastery of his idols. On the other hand, inserted as they are between Rossetti's Antwerp and Bruges carillon experiences, these two short lines reveal the inadequacy of the "official" artistic institutions in helping the poet reach this moment of epiphanic, aesthetic experience. Real appreciation of art, Rossetti shows, happens outside the realm of museums or church galleries. Freed from an academic and institutional roadmap, and free to turn to his own senses, it is on top of Belgian belfries and cathedrals, and on an almost metaphysical plane, that Rossetti is able to create an intellectual connection that will truly heighten his own aestheticism.

Rossetti's Belgian travel poems, written barely a month before the first publication of *The Germ*, offer a fascinating window into beliefs and practices that became the core of the early Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic mission, which aimed at questioning Victorian conceptions of academic art, bringing fresh energy and imagination onto the British art scene, and reconsidering individual emotions and perceptions (including those of the lyric poet him/herself) as subjects worth writing about.

CHAPTER 4

FLORENCE MARRYAT'S GOTHIC FACADES: THE DIVERSE ROLES OF COASTAL BELGIUM IN *THE BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE* (1897)

"The other vampire story of 1897"

In her 1893 interview with Florence Marryat, Helen C. Black notes that "Miss Marryat has never looked at a criticism on her books. She says her publishers are her best friends, and their purses are her assessors, and she is quite satisfied with the result" (91). Marryat was a prolific late-Victorian writer, a "notable woman" (to quote Black), and her famous father, multiple marriages, theatrical performances, belief in the occult, and work as *London Society* 's editor placed her among the highly visible figures of popular entertainment.[127] However, her undisguised commercial approach to writing might explain in part why the majority of her (more than ninety) novels have sunk into oblivion. On the surface, the subject of this chapter, *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), with its mixture of family drama, scandalous love affairs and supernatural allusions, exemplifies the author's inclination to be "merely pandering for popularity" (Casey 9). The novel was a commercial success,[128] but contemporary critical responses were generally negative, in part, Howard Malchow explains, because Marryat's "Roman Catholicism and spiritualism conspired with her gender to ensure … a generally condescending tone in her male critics" (168), but also, arguably, because of her heavy-handed

127 Marryat was the daughter of famous captain and writer of naval stories Frederick Marryat. For a detailed account of her life, see Palmer.
128 *The Blood of the Vampire* sold more copies in 1897 than Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

use of sensationalist and Gothic tropes.[129] Rediscovered in the efforts to unearth the works of lesser-known Victorian female authors, the novel has been approached in the last two decades as an exemplar of turn-of-the-century sensationalist Gothic fiction. Often considered alongside *Dracula*, it has been read—as are a lot of similar Gothic narratives from the 1890's—through the lens of Victorian racial prejudices, attitudes towards the New Woman, as well as scientific beliefs and medical practices, and has thus enjoyed some renewed critical scrutiny.

A short (one-volume) narrative aimed at readers of popular literature, *The Blood of the Vampire* is not overly complicated, but its sensationalist themes encourage multiple plot twists. The novel opens with an overview of the characters vacationing in the Belgian coastal town of Heyst: Margaret Pullen; her engaged friend, the aristocratic Elinor Leyton; the latter's fiancé and Margaret's brother-in-law, Ralph Pullen; the Gobellis, a family of tradespeople; and last but not least, Harriet Brandt, a rich mixed-race single woman. Harriet, who develops a fondness for Margaret and her baby, strikes her company as a naive, exuberant girl unaware of rules of propriety. Fueled by Margaret's doctor, Robert Phillips, rumors spread that Harriet is the quadroon daughter of the dubious scientist Henry Brandt and the creole daughter of a British official, and that her parents were both murdered following their inhumane treatment of workers on their Jamaican plantation. Harriet recently left the convent where she had been placed, and she enamors herself with Ralph who openly flirts back. When Margaret's sickly baby suddenly dies, forcing her family to return to Britain, Doctor Phillips secretly blames Harriet's influence, her "fatal heritage" (195) which, according to him, turned her into a vampiric woman. The novel proceeds to describe Harriet as she is staying at Baroness Gobelli's house in Britain, hoping to reconnect with Ralph. During her stay, she discovers that the Baroness is a successful, but

129 Quoting a 1897 critic from the *Pall Mall Gazette* who wrote that "Marryat's pseudo-scientific explanation of her origin in the mouth of a rambling old doctor, is altogether too indigestible. It is, too, unnecessary and hideous" (169), Sarah Willburn points to Marryat's cliché mixture of racial stereotypes and the supernatural as plot device at a time when late-Victorian readers might have become weary of them.

ruthless manager of her husband's factory bent on physical cruelty towards her employees, but also that she pretends to practice black magic to extort and blackmail her wealthy visitors. Meanwhile, in an attempt to assuage Elinor's fear that Harriet might get into contact with Ralph, Margaret sends her husband's cousin, the socialist writer Anthony Pennell, to threaten Harriet with a lawsuit. However, he and Harriet quickly fall in love. Harriet is driven away from the Gobellis' house after the Baroness's son, secretly in love with Harriet, unexpectedly dies. The Baroness, acquainted with the theories of Doctor Phillips, blames Harriet. After visiting Phillips, who laconically repeats his diagnosis, Harriet is torn between despair and disbelief. But Anthony, who disregards those theories as superstitions, refuses Harriet's plea to end their relationship and instead proposes to her. Their Continental honeymoon ends abruptly in Italy: after waking up and finding Anthony lying dead next to her, Harriet commits suicide, leaving a note in which she bequeaths her fortune to Margaret.

As this brief summary might already show, *The Blood of the Vampire*'s plot and its authorial voice call upon typical tropes of Gothic narratives (in particular the theme of vampiric *femmes fatales*). However, there is more to Marryat's appeal to the Gothic than meets the eye, and a careful scrutiny of her use of these tropes, once coupled with an analysis of her use of Belgium as the novel's backdrop, reveals intentions that go beyond merely crafting a quick best-seller. Indeed, I argue in this chapter that Marryat's novel features two concurrent, inter-connected narrative threads: one which stems from the author's creative use of Belgium in the first half of the novel to expose issues such as rank classicism and racism on a British as well as a global level, and another originating in the novel's simultaneous use and questioning of a supernatural thematic (in which the Belgian setting also actively participates). In the first thread, social and racial tensions are showcased through a Belgian setting that encourages close

proximity among tourists from varied walks of life. In the second, somewhat more complex thread, the novel's narrator and characters, I will show, methodically use supernaturalism as a smokescreen to cover up a sub-narrative of flaws, prejudices and deceits. In *Blood of the Vampire*, readers are invited to shift their attention away from the novel's Gothic promise and direct it instead towards these representations of social class in and outside of Britain, as well as the effects of global economy on British class perceptions. I argue that 1890's Belgium and its coastlines—a surprising backdrop for a vampire story (given the British perception of Belgium at the time as an unexotic, dull nation)—play a crucial role in grounding the novel in a more modern and realist (rather than supernatural), pessimistic vision of global fin-de-siècle culture. The Belgian coastal setting—direct recipient of wealth from the Belgian colonial enterprise—functions as an ideal site of experimentation to investigate the themes of social prejudices, hypocrisy and racism, as well as a point of reference to describe the impact of colonial practices on a global scale.

Touristic coastal Belgium as site of social experimentation and critique

The novel's first half is set in Heyst and focuses on a set of British tourists who, in the second half, return to Britain. To understand the significance of Marryat's choice of a Belgian setting, it is necessary to consider the somewhat ambivalent state of Belgo-British relations at the time of the novel's publication. As pointed out in my analysis of *Villette* and *The Professor*, the British view of Belgium as an exemplary modern nation and possible mirror image of Britain on the Continent waned in the second half of the nineteenth century. Late Victorians might not have exhibited the same degree of nationalistic animosity towards Belgium as they did, say, towards France, but they rarely thought of the small kingdom in positive terms if they thought about it at

all. Most of them would have viewed late nineteenth-century Belgium and its inhabitants as provincial and dull—a feeling which, despite Britain's exceptional relation to Belgium in both World Wars, never really changed. However, in the 1880s and 1890s, two very different occurrences put Belgium back on the British public's map: the rise of Belgian sea-side towns as popular touristic destinations and the colonization of the Congo.

Directly connected to Marryat's choice of Heyst is the rise of trans-Channel tourism and the interest of British (but also French and German) travelers in vacationing in Belgian coastal towns. Separated from their British counterparts by less than a hundred miles, these bathing towns (Marryat names Heyst, but also Ostend and Blankenberge) were distant enough that they were too expensive for budget-conscious lower-class Britons, but close enough that the middle and upper classes enjoyed them for short vacations. These Continental coastal towns offered a flavor of unthreatening exoticism—exemplified in *The Blood of the Vampire* by some of Belgium's street festivals—alongside the assurance that, if something bad was to arise (as, in the novel, the death of baby Ethel), the motherland was only a few hours away. These towns offered simultaneously local color and international flair. Benefiting from the centrality of Belgium in Northern Europe, the efficiency of Belgian modes of transportation on land and on water, as well as the increased importance of Belgian ports (such as Antwerp) as points of arrival for goods coming from Africa and other parts of the world, these coastal towns regularly served as a point of passage for visitors of varied international horizons. As such, it is not an entirely surprising background for the introduction of Harriet Brandt, quadroon daughter of a West Indian mother and Swiss father, fluent in French,[130] singing in Spanish, somewhat desperately viewing herself

130 Note the confusion created among the other characters by her multilingual abilities: "English! I should never have guessed it … she speaks French so well" (9). While Harriet views herself as British ("I hoped … that I spoke English like an English woman! I am an Englishwoman, you know!" [16]), the characters around her associate this knowledge of French and "slightly foreign accent" (15) with dangerous otherness, just like they associate Baroness Gobelli's accent with her low-class origins.

as British, and traveling with a Belgian friend. Similarly, Baroness Gobelli, with her German husband and noble title, Italian-sounding name and London business, is not as out of place there as might appear. In the novel, coastal Belgium is a supposedly neutral contact zone,[131] a connecting buffer between Britain, the Continent, and the rest of the world.

Interestingly, however, Marryat chose this setting at a time when the specific appeal of these coastal towns was starting to abate among middle- and upper-class British tourists. In the second half of the century, large-scale transportation by water, roads and trains enabled the wealthy travelers to explore more exotic options.[132] The old Grand Tour tradition, a favorite among Romantic travelers, became for any well-off late-Victorian tourists willing to resurrect the practice, a mere matter of making swift travel arrangements via the flourishing British tour-operator business. Even the United-States or, as the novel hints, Australia, became destinations within reach. Therefore, while still not quite comparable to the largely working-class visitors to the British sea-side towns of Blackpool, Southend, or Brighton, most of Marryat's British visitors in Heyst, as I will show, tend to lack taste, money, morality, or rank. The international, but unexciting, "cheap" Belgium becomes a useful locale for a social experiment that forces a close proximity between Harriet, a character with an exceptional global background, and various British characters who, despite being interested in international travel, are shown to be unexceptional, uninspired members of the British middle and upper-middle classes—or even, as in the case of Elinor Leyton, the declining aristocracy. Whereas, in Britain, the paths of these different characters would not have crossed, such proximity, spurred by the Belgian touristic environment, reveals national prejudices and the destructive power of bigotry.

131 See Pratt (6).
132 Forty years earlier, Thackeray was already contrasting the Fat Contributor's blasé attitude towards Belgium with his eagerness to travel to the Orient.

After a very brief view of Heyst, *The Blood of the Vampire* opens by describing the British tourists staying at the *Maison d'Hôte*, particularly the Baroness (and tradeswoman) Gobelli and her family—a focus that highlights the role of socio-economics in the novel. The *Hôtel Lion d'Or*, despite its pompous name and its "two great gilded lions … [standing] rampart on either side the portals" (3), is portrayed as prestigious only in appearance: the bell summoning clients to dinner is "loud and discordant," the tables inside are decorated with "dusty geraniums and fuchsias" or "a small bunch of dirty artificial flowers," the food, a "tête de veau aux champignons" (5), is anything but refined. Most of the clientele, a "motley crew of English, Germans, and Belgians" (3), while often presenting itself as used to loftier environments, is surprisingly at ease. So, for example, the foreign visitors, including the British, are shown rushing in to be served their food, asking for second helpings, "chattering … as fast as their tongues could travel," or calling to order their "children, mostly unruly and ill-behaved" (3), all this in ways reminiscent of the chaotic dining scenes described in Thackeray's *Little Travels*. However, while comedy stems in Thackeray from the upper-class Britons adopting surprisingly undignified behavior under the strain of mass tourism, Marryat's Belgium serves to highlight a lack of social decorum among declasse and middle-class visitors whose characters, the second half of the novel confirms, are equally questionable on each side of the Channel, even if they pretend otherwise.

Being such a tourist in Belgium involves a degree of physical proximity among protagonists of different classes, nationalities and, as in the case of Harriet, races and religions that, comments made by characters clarify, would be unimaginable in Britain. Operating through Marryat's descriptions of the various guests in and outside the Hôtel is a leveling of these differences. While Elinor makes a point of distancing herself from both the Gobellis and, later,

Harriet, most guests effortlessly mingle, that is, within the confines of national affiliations. This sense of national boundaries providing the last rampart, illustrated in the above 1900 drawing of the Ostend beach from the *Illustrated London News* by little mounds of sands topped by the visitors' respective national flag, is echoed in *The Blood of the Vampire* by the bathing machines, some of them "belonging to private families … sport[ing] flags moreover of France or Germany" (26).

Figure 1 - British tourists in Oscar Wilson's *August by the Sea: On the Sands at Ostend*
(Illustration from the August 25 1900 issue of the *Illustrated London News*)

The Belgian coastline, embracing the open sea and seemingly deprived of its own national markers, becomes, as the tide rolls in and out, an ever-resurfacing ground ready to be claimed by foreign visitors, much as Belgium as a whole itself seemed to be by foreign powers before its

independence. Despite their desire to keep up appearances, the British characters in *The Blood of the Vampire* cannot afford their own private bathing machines. Marryat underlines the comical aspect of changing in the latter, particularly when dealing with British visitors (in ways also reminiscent of Thackeray's bathing scenes as described by his Fat Contributor). Stress is originally put on the prudishness of British women and the impropriety of bathing too close to other men. Quickly, however, the narrator's observations (somewhat colored by Elinor and Margaret's own visions of the scene), also emphasize the equalizing character of the experience:

> The very skinny and knuckle-kneed ones; the very fat and bulging ones, the little fair men who looked like Bobby's peeled shrimps, the muscular black and hairy ones who looked like bears escaped from a menagerie—these types and many others, our ladies could not help being amused at, though they told each other it was very improper all the time. But everybody had to pass through the same ordeal and everybody submitted to it, and tried to laugh off their own humiliation by ridiculing the appearance of their neighbours. (31-32, my emphasis)

In these representations of the Hôtel's chaotic surroundings, the Gobellis play an emphatic role. The British Baroness, a large lady who enjoys ordering her husband around and mocking her son, is described gluttonously eating, shouting out to guests, cursing and disrespecting the local staff. When Harriet Brandt is introduced to the opening dinner scene, her princess-like countenance raises a few eyebrows, but the text swiftly returns to the Baroness, as if she were the main character. Her behavior and the mystery surrounding her past are clear attention-grabbers:

> Who the Baroness had originally been, no one could quite make out. It was evident she must have sprung from some low origin, from her lack of education and breeding, yet she spoke familiarly of aristocratic names, even Royal ones, and

> appeared to be acquainted with their families and homes. There was a floating rumour that she had been old Mr. Bate's cook before he married her, and when he left her a widow with an only child and a considerable fortune, the little German Baron had thought that her money was a fair equivalent for her personality. (6)

Before introducing Harriet's mystery, *The Blood of the Vampire* thus introduces the Baroness's uncertain past and her surprising acquaintances. And before rumors about Harriet's supposed vampiric powers start spreading, the first mention of the supernatural involves the Baroness herself who "laid claim to holding intercourse with certain supernatural and invisible beings, who had the power to wreak vengeance on all those who offended her." It is through these so-called powers that the Baroness has been able to hold intercourse with "aristocratic names, even Royal ones" (6). As readers later learn, the Baroness uses these fake "séances" and the help of a spy and crook, Alexander Milliken, to blackmail her aristocratic visitors. Tellingly, Marryat, who professed belief in spiritualism in her autobiographic writing,[133] places an imposter in *The Blood of the Vampire*. The revelation of the Baroness's wrongdoings sheds light on how immorality can hide behind a facade of respectability, a theme, I argue, central to *The Blood of the Vampire*. From the point of view of genre, it also constitutes a challenge to the supernatural promise of the novel. The Baroness's powers are actually fraudulent just as, as I will show, those assigned to Harriet are imagined and projected. All these allusions to the supernatural turn out to be the visible side of a complex, deceiving narrative construct.

The Baroness, like Harriet, is introduced as both an insider and a stranger to the circle of travelers. Her improprieties mark her as an "eccentric" (literally, "outside of the center") and the text makes clear that, but for the situation of international traveling, many of the other British

133 See *There is No Death* (1891).

guests would not socialize with her. The Belgian Hôtel's environment encourages unexpected social encounters and exchanges, a fact emphasized by Elinor's remarks. The latter, who stands out for her open criticism of the Baroness's behavior, whispers to Margaret that "you never know what acquaintances you may make in a place like this," and that, when she "look[s] up and down the table d'hôte menagerie sometimes, it makes [her] quite ill" (10). Even Margaret has to point out that "[i]t is almost impossible to be private in a hotel like this!" (81) and when Elinor stresses to Ralph, her fiance, the impropriety of his interacting so closely with the Gobellis, he admits,

> You're alluding to the Baron and the Baroness being in trade. Well! as a rule I confess that I do not care to associate intimately with boot-makers and their friends, but one does things abroad that one would not dream of doing in England. And for all her vulgarity, Madame Gobelli is very good-natured and generous, and I really don't see that I lower my dignity by being on friendly terms with her whilst here! (91, my emphasis)

Elinor's unease is not restricted to the Baroness, but she is acute in pointing out what she views as Ralph's (and other British tourist's) overall hypocrisy: "Neither do I admire the spirit which would induce you to hobnob with them in Heyst, when you would cut them in Bond Street" (92). Were the setting to shift from Belgium to Britain (which it will), Elinor hints, things would be very different.

While the quadroon Harriet is primarily marked as a racial outsider whose naivete startles the British tourists, Baroness Gobelli is primarily marked as social climber whose vulgarity shocks them. Both find it hard to fit. Just as Harriet divulges what she knows of her colonial origins, Baroness Gobelli frankly admits being in trade. The Baroness's character is actually

more fully developed and multidimensional than that of Harriet.[134] The Belgian setting enables the characters to challenge the kind of propriety Elinor values by emphasizing the tenuous connections between honorary titles, hereditary class, income, and conduct. Whereas Harriet is a racial creole, the Baroness, "a strange mixture … of vulgarity and refined tastes" (144), is a socioeconomic one: she is an opportunist who simultaneously exhibits pretensions to nobility, the wealth of a successful middle-class trader, but also many tell-tale signs of her low-class origins. Her international connections to a German husband with a global business, make her slightly less prejudiced towards her Belgian environment (her amusement towards some of the town's street festivities, for example, contrasts sharply with Elinor's overall disdain) or toward people like Harriet; but these traits also increase the prejudice of her fellow Britons. In these early sections of the novel, the social proximity forced by the touristic Belgian environment onto the various British characters eventually exacerbates their incompatible personalities and underlines the injustice inherent in British national prejudices when it comes to both class and racial differences.

It is worth noting that the thematic importance of the Gobelli family in the Belgian half of the novel will continue in the opening chapter of the British half. Chapter 10 introduces the "Red House at Holloway" and, through it, a glimpse at the family's finances and lifestyle. Seen through Harriet's eyes, the house is at first a great disappointment; it looks "as though it belonged to people who had fallen, from the utmost affluence, to the depths of poverty" (113), which leads her to believe that the Baroness's "income was not a tenth part of what she represented" (112). When Harriet enters the bedroom, she notes that "there was too much pomp and too little comfort in it" (116). However, her hosts have not so much fallen "to the depths of poverty," as

134 That is, until the death of Bobby, at which point she becomes a flatter, melodramatic version of herself and, to quote Costantini, "dwindles into a minor pale figure that has lost both her grotesqueness and her funny vitality" (93).

they are guilty of focusing on the appearances of wealth and spending to impress. The eclectic, inconsistent nature of their interior hints at a possible lack of good taste rooted in the Baroness's questionable cultivation as a former member of the lower class. The reader learns that money cannot buy such consistent good taste when the narrator shows such pretenses as a barouche "standing in the coach-house" with "no horses to draw it" (115); unnecessary rooms filled with "dust, damp, rats and decay" (112); an untuned piano (122); and valuables, "piled on rickety tables which threatened every minute" to collapse (112). The continuous undermining of appearances extends to all aspects of the Gobellis' domestic life: one day, champagne is served for dinner, the other, steaks and onions; one moment, the Baroness gives Anthony a tour of her precious China collection, the next she makes a fool of herself in front of him by playing with her dog on the floor and unveiling "a black woolen stocking full of holes" (162). Margaret's observation reinforces the Baroness's nature as a social oddity: a woman who "drops all her aspirates, yet talks familiarly of aristocratic and royal titles," "dresses like a cook out on Sundays, and yet has a passion for good paintings and old China" (144).

However, despite the Baronness's desire to inflate her wealth, the family's business is shown to be truly successful. In the shift from the resort pleasures of Heyst to the rapidly-expanding Holloway (which, by the end of the century, had become one of London's most commercial neighborhoods), the reader recognizes the actual material plenty beneath the social comedy of the character's pretenses. Miss Wynward, the Baronness's maid, admits that her employer is a hard-working, "very clever woman" who "knows something about most things" and "fancies that nothing can go on properly [in the factory] without her. And she is right in so far that she has a much better head for business than the Baron" (121). While the Baroness might not be spending her money in ways that make sense to Harriet, Elinor or Anthony, she proves to

be a careful manager of the family's business. Hence, most of the British characters' criticisms of this character are grounded in class prejudice, anticipating the similar process at work in their attitudes towards Harriet after the Doctor's "revelations." Both women's origins are modest. Harriet is the daughter of a *nouveau-riche* father who, after being excluded from scientific circles in Europe, made a fortune as a plantation owner. Neither woman, in the eyes of the likes of Elinor, deserves her fortune and neither spends it as people with a family history of wealth would.[135] These shared qualities isolate the Baroness and Harriet from the other characters in Belgium; little wonder they seek each other's company.

The difficult proximity of culturally diverse British tourists in Belgium extends into the second half of the novel as Elinor attempts to clear her name and, as a result, needs to deal with Harriet and the Gobellis. Elinor, a member of the British aristocracy, stands out in the group of otherwise middle-class Britons vacationing in Belgium. Her reasons for being in Heyst are somewhat unclear, as she is shown wanting to accompany her friend Margaret as the latter waits for her husband to return from India, but also resenting most of the entertainment the coastal town has to offer. At the core of Elinor's frustration at having to socialize with the Gobellis lie three major elements: the assumption that, as an aristocrat, she should not have to mingle with "traders," the tacit recognition that her honorary title is not enough anymore to cover up for her family's bankruptcy and, finally, jealousy towards the Gobellis as exemplars of a rising group of "nouveaux riches" making smart business choices in an increasingly global economy. In many ways, the illusion, in the Belgian context of the novel, that members of these various social milieus could peacefully coexist only exacerbates their conflictual relationship in Britain. Elinor's annoyed comment that Baroness Gobelli "thinks her money will atone for all her other

135 Note, for example, the tasteless eclecticism of the Baroness's interior or, in the case of Harriet, the unease felt by Margaret and Elinor as Harriet is attempting to buy their friendship and the love of Margaret's daughter.

shortcomings" (10-11) implies that taste (and, supposedly, morality) is something one must be born with, but her subsequent observation of the Baroness offering a girl "a valuable brooch off her own throat" (11) and her anticipation that "this *nouveau riche* will try to curry favour with us by the same means" (11) shows that the rising merchant class embodied by the Gobelli family is aware of the financial difficulties of people like Elinor and is ready to exploit the latter's impoverishment to buy the respectability they themselves desire. As the Baroness herself puts it, "princes are all rubbish! … they've none of them got any money." (129-130) and "It's money they're all after in these times" (44), reflecting a reversal of class power dynamics as well as the increasing displacement of social class by financial power, a common literary theme throughout the 19th century.

It is not surprising that Elinor, who "thought very little of any aristocracy, except that of her own country" (4) but has little money of her own, should feel annoyed by both Harriet and the Baroness. Her response to Ralph's romantic entanglement with Harriet expands further the aforementioned socioeconomic concerns of the novel. Elinor repeatedly expresses her disapproval of non-members of the aristocracy, such as the Baroness (because of her low origins), Harriet (because of her foreignness) and the Belgian locals and their quaint traditions.[136] But her dignified stance is, just as is the case with the Baroness, a facade.[137] While she attempts to present herself as a pillar of taste and morality (at a time when the British aristocracy had long ceased to be leaders of morals or economic growth), Elinor's primary focus turns out to be trying to escape the financial stress she is under, which in turn colors her relation to Ralph. The narrator tells us in passing that "Elinor Leyton's nature did not make extravagant demands upon her

136 Whereas the bathers on Heyst's beaches literally claimed their national space through the aid of little flags, Elinor is shown rather painstakingly trying to claim "social" space for herself and Raph within the hotel.
137 So we learn from the Baroness, "[Elinor]'s the daughter of Lord Walthamstowe, but that's nothing. They've got no money. 'Er people live down in the country quite in a beggerly manner. A gal with a fortune of 'er own would rank 'eds and 'eads above 'er in Society. There's not much thoughts of beside money, nowadays, I can tell you!" (43)

lover" (53), and she proves surprisingly unfazed by Ralph's flirtation with Harriet—less because she is aware of Belgium's potential in undermining British social etiquette than because she knows her alternatives are limited. She might at times strike readers as fashionably independent ("I am not in the habit of dancing attendance upon men. It is their business to come after me" [65]), but it becomes increasingly clear that, unlike Harriet, who pursues Ralph for love, Elinor only holds on to him for financial stability. Ralph, on the other hand, needs Elinor for her title (Ralph "liked the idea of being connected with an aristocratic family" [28]). The vehemence with which Elinor later wants to protect this tacit agreement thus has a lot more to do with protecting her reputation and her "investment" (a key term in the novel) in Ralph than with affection. Ralph's love affair has little effect on the self-interest-driven path he and Elinor have mutually agreed to take, and just as Belgium is quickly shown unable to "deliver" as a would-be exotic location for a torrid love affair between the apparently highly compatible Ralph and Harriet, *The Blood of the Vampire* dilutes its own sensationalist tropes by describing a character well-aware of her fiancé's past and current misbehavior and ready to turn a blind eye on them for self-benefit. Money, *The Blood of the Vampire* makes clear through Anthony's own later remark, is "the true magician of [the] century" (219)—a very fitting metaphor for a novel which, I will show, has little to do with the fantastical and a lot more to do with audience manipulation, greed and prejudice.[138]

138 Such focus on money as the engine of a sensationalist plot was not unusual in the late 1890s, and often went hand in hand with the image of the suddenly financially-aware New Woman. However, unlike another of Marryat's novels, *The Strange Transformation of Hannah Stubs* (1896), the main character of *The Blood of the Vampire*, Harriet, while having recently discovered the pleasures of financial freedom after leaving the convent she had been placed in, does not stand for the new "Victorian woman … awakening to the power of the pound sterling" (Dickerson 144), seeking financial power by force or murder. Entitled to her own wealth, Harriet is instead the victim of others' desire for it (including the Baroness herself).

The Belgian international setting and the critique of globalism

As I have suggested, next to coastal tourism, Belgium's colonial enterprise in Central Africa is a major element that affected late-Victorian perceptions of the country. While, on a local level, Belgium continued to be perceived as an unexceptional destination, the colonizing ambitions of its sovereign were, on a global level, making headlines. Despite Belgian King Leopold II's assurances for instance, during the 1876 Congo Conference, that the goals of his expeditions into Central Africa were purely scientific and humanitarian, the young Congo Free State was "notorious as a sphere of imperialistic exploitation" (Luebering 149) well before Marryat wrote her novel. The early history of Congo's colonization in the 1870s earned its notoriety from the efforts of Leopold II to acquire property in Africa in his own name, and not in the name of the nation he ruled over. The lack of official involvement of the Belgian state in these imperial dealings, which lasted for over two decades, stemmed from the Belgian's government reluctance to get involved in a mission which had far-reaching international dimensions, was deemed a financial risk (before the sudden demand for rubber on the global market), and threatened to break some of the rules connected to its status as a neutral state[139]— the same rules which Britain had actively encouraged the young Belgian state to adopt after its independence, and which Britain itself was closely overseeing. By 1897, which also marked the publication of Conrad's "Outpost of Progress," the consequences of the 1885 Berlin Conference were becoming clear,[140] and late-Victorian readers were increasingly cognizant of rumors

139 King Leopold , as he eventually bequeathed the Congo Free State to Belgium, also gave the latter the right to annex it within the 10 following years. The decision was fought against by European lawyers who saw in such annexation a breach against Belgium's neutral status. The Belgian government was initially reluctant to take on their King's offer, but unwilling to "humiliate their sovereign by repudiating the agreements he had made with the international community," agreed. The effect of this agreement also meant that "In Belgium, [King Leopold] would continue to be a constitutional monarch. In the Congo, he would be his own autocrat." (Ewans 168)

140 While officializing (and therefore giving credence to) King Leopold's pseudo-philanthropic endeavors, claiming anti-slavery sentiments, and internationalizing the Congo Basin to avoid conflicts between the powers at play, the nations involved in the Conference did very little to prevent the exploitation and atrocities taking place.

concerning colonial brutality in the Congo (which Conrad famously described again in *Heart of Darkness*, a novel he based on first-hand observations dating back to 1891*).*

The Blood of the Vampire was published before the graphic revelations of British journalists (such as E.D. Morel) concerning the colonizing practices in the Free Congo State and the ensuing campaigns of the Congo Reform Association, and it naturally does not address Belgian colonization as explicitly as Conrad would a few years later. Nevertheless, it exhibits both direct references to the topics of imperial influence and colonization (via Harriet Brandt's revelations about her West-Indian past, but also via the references to the military profession of characters who served in India[141]), as well as subtle allusions to the hypocrisy behind Belgium's colonial "respectability." As I will show in this section, Belgium's reputation as an emerging colonial power inflects Marryat's use of the country as the novel's setting, particularly when it comes to the contrasted themes of respectability and hypocrisy, local and global business practices (as embodied by the Gobellis and the story of Harriet's parents), and social and racial exclusion.

Just as British characters like Elinor, Ralph or the Baroness exhibit only a facade of respectability, so does Belgium itself in *The Blood of the Vampire*. The setting of the "Hôtel" is one that mixes symbols of the country's supposed national grandeur (such as the "two great gilded lions" [national symbols] standing "rampart on either side of the portals" [3]) while offering details pointing to its fallibility: the hotel's bell is "loud" but "discordant," the flowers on the table turn out to be "dirty" and "artificial" on closer inspection (3). These details, I argue, not only help underline the decreased popularity of Belgian seaside towns amongst a richer, more discerning foreign clientele, but also serve to expose the awkward pretense of its inhabitants (and Belgium as a whole) to look respectable. To most informed readers, the apparent

141 Ralph, Arthur (Margaret's husband), and Doctor Phillips have all been garrisoned in India.

harmlessness and the dullness of the novel's Belgian coastal setting as described by Marryat would have clashed with the emerging narratives of the country's actions in the Congo. Because of such dissonance and because it sets Belgium as the international meeting points of various characters connected to varied forms of global violence (Harriet's plantation background, Baroness Gobelli's mistreatment of her workers, Margaret and Elinor's relations with men garrisoned in India, the doctor's own connection to Jamaica as a young soldier stationed there), *The Blood of the Vampire* invites its readers to ponder the inter-connectedness of such violence, its proximity, and its mobility, as well as the hypocrisy of those bent on minimizing it. Belgian coastal towns, as departure and entry points of international military and commercial ships, are, behind their appearance as pleasant vacation destinations, to be understood as firm nodes in such global networks.[142]

Several elements, such as the mention of a major train station (48) and the use of the "Hôtel Lion d'Or" as the resort place for the British characters,[143] suggest that Marryat's novel conflated Heyst with the larger town of Ostend. Not entirely surprisingly, Marryat's point of reference for the main location in the first half of the novel thus happens to have been a particularly privileged area of architectural investment by King Leopold II, as exemplified by the consecutive constructions in Ostend of the *Wellington Race Track* (1883), the *Maria-Hendrika Park* (1892) or, later, the neoclassical *Royal Galleries* (1902). Largely subsidized by Leopold's own private financial endeavors in the Congo, coastal landmarks were not only meant to add charm to the King's favorite secondary residence (several large royal villas were built from 1874 onwards), they were also meant to embody his (and Belgium's) imperial ambitions, the lucrativeness of his enterprise, and the centrality of seaside towns in the latter. Indeed, each of

142 This connection between the sea-side town and global military and economic activity is alluded to as Elinor and Margaret are described as they "walked across the Digue and stood, looking out over the sea. [Elinor] was anticipating the arrival of her fiancé, Captain Ralph Pullen of the Limerick Rangers" (7).
143 The "Hôtel Lion d'Or" is listed by Murray as a "2nd class" hotel in Ostend. (Murray 123).

the aforementioned landmarks was designed to mimic those of other colonial nations and celebrate Belgium's achievements. So the *Wellington Race Track* hinted at military grandeur, the role played by Belgium in the Napoleonic Wars, and Belgo-British friendship. The *Maria-Hendrika Park* was meant to stand as a competitor to France's *Bois de Boulogne*. *The Royal Galleries* rivaled with other prestigious examples of French neoclassicism.[144] Despite their peaceful appearance, Belgian coastal town like Heyst or Ostend were among the eager recipients of (and showcases for) profits from the Belgian colonial enterprise.

Early on in the novel, Belgium embodies presumptuous, bourgeois values emphasizing appearance over substance, pretense over truth, judgment over morality—"qualities" it is quickly shown to share with the majority of its British visitors. The prosaic, unglamorous Belgium becomes, through Marryat's manipulation of her readers' expectations, the perfect emblem of her characters' dubious morality. The surprising character of Belgium as the backdrop of what turns out to be a pseudo-Gothic story, mirrors the unconvincing characters of Elinor, Harriet, Dr Phillips and Baroness Gobelli in a narrative that turns out, as I will show, to have little to do with actual vampire hunting, and everything to do with racial prejudices, social clashes and aggressive financial ambitions. Indeed, Belgium's Gothic promise eventually falls apart. Marryat, by writing a narrative which strives to undermine its own supernatural pretension, and by setting part of this narrative in a Belgian location which, in the 1890s, was finding it increasingly difficult to retain the pretense of respectability following rumors of colonial brutality, does two things. First, she meta-textually criticizes and rejects Gothic narratives which, because of their embeddedness in the supernatural or the fantastical, legitimize unfair racial, social and gender-based prejudices. Second, she criticizes global practices of colonialism and industrialization. The "horror" which

144 Uncoincidentally, their architect, the French Charles Girault, was also commissioned to build Brussels' *Royal Museum of Central Africa* (1897), infamous repository of Belgium's massive appropriation of items of high ethnographic, artistic and scientific interest from the Free Congo State.

her readers might be trying to find in her novel does not stem from a Gothic promise backed up by an unconvincing narrative voice—it is more akin to that which late-Victorian readers witnessed a few years later through the eyes of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. *The Blood of Vampire*'s horror, far from fantastical, emerges from a much more realist meta-narrative that sheds light on the violence at the heart of a global economy and the callousness of its perpetrators, the hypocrisy of British aristocratic and upper-middle classes, and the destruction of morality by obsessive financial greed.

At the center of *The Blood of the Vampire*'s colonial thematic stands the character of Harriet herself and her childhood spent in Jamaica. Historical connections between Belgium and Jamaica did exist, but were relatively minor.[145] However, it is through the tapestry of international characters that Marryat's novel draws the networks that connect Harriet's childhood in the West Indies to Belgium. This connection comes in the form of her close relation to Olga Brimont, a young Belgian orphan girl whom Harriet befriended in the French-speaking Jamaican convent in which Harriet was educated after her parents died in the West Indies (28). While the novel does not reveal the reasons for Olga's presence in the West Indies, readers do learn that the two girls have always traveled together and that Olga's brother, Alfred, is a "young Brussels tradesman" (108). The narrative also describes Harriet particularly at home in her Belgian coastal environment: "Isn't it lovely here?—so soft and warm, *something like the Island*, but so much fresher!" (11, my emphasis). Belgium, with its wide, direct access to the sea, is likened to Jamaica—a different, though comparable node on the colonial network that makes it likewise possible to liken Belgium to the London of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.*

145 Let us mention the role played by some priests who were trained in Jamaica prior to the evangelization of the Congo Free State, and that of Jamaican workers sent to the Belgian colony to help build its railroads.

In Belgium, the British characters quickly become aware of the problematic source of Harriet's wealth. The world in which Harriet grew up and which eventually made her rich is marked by violence and slave-like working conditions. In a memorable moment of the novel's second chapter, Harriet non-chalantly explains,

> We had plenty of niggers on the coffee plantation, regular African fellows, with wooly heads and blubber lips, and yellow whites to their eyes. When I was a little thing of four years old, Pete used to let me whip the little niggers for a treat, when they had done anything wrong. It used to make me laugh to see them wriggle their legs under the whip and cry! … It's true, but they deserved it, you know, the little wretches, always thieving or lying or something! I've seen a woman whipped to death because she wouldn't work. We think nothing of that sort of thing, over there (20).

Terra Walston Joseph analyzes Harriet's shocking revelation in the context of "contemporary perspectives on post-emancipation conditions in the British West-Indies" (189), arguing that the novel reflects Marryat's pessimistic view on self-governance after the abolition of slavery. At the time the episode supposedly takes place, after both the Emancipation Act of 1834 and the following four-year period where the "apprenticeship" system (of indentured servants) was still in place in Jamaica, these "niggers on the coffee plantation" were legitimate workers, not slaves. Harriet's casual revelation of graphic cruelty stands at the meeting point of several narrative threads. On a thematic level, it foreshadows the upcoming references to the cruelty Harriet is believed to possess as a (supposed) vampiric *femme fatale* while leaving readers to question Harriet's humanity. The passage also demonstrates Harriet's detachment from her own African descent. She does not identify herself as sharing much with these "regular African fellows, with

woolly heads and blubbler lips" (interestingly, the way Anthony originally imagines her), which explains why she feels—unlike the people around her—that she should be allowed to fit nicely in the group of other British (white) travelers. Last but not least, Harriet, as the daughter of a former slave-owner who did not allow emancipation to alter his (or his overseer's) cruel practices, embodies the continuing "'illegitimate' sources of English wealth and the unseemly origins of English imperial power" (DeVere Brody 18), as well as the risk of seeing cruelty extend its reach to workers of any status. Harriet's depiction of her Jamaican upbringing at a time when slavery had been abolished suggests that global commodities such as coffee are still inextricable from lingering imperial violence.[146] The text also implies that the mistreatment of workers, impelled by the quest for global profits, transcends the boundaries of national and racial affiliation. To drive this point home, Marryat not only describes Harriet, a girl who, willfully or not, ignores her Creole background as she beats her father's workers (many of whom would have been former slaves), but also "old Pete, the overseer," Harriet's "nigger servant" (21) who, similarly empowered by this global system of exploitation, gleefully shares his violent prerogatives with the young daughter of his employer.

The many parallels between Harriet and the Baroness extend to a history of violence as the text highlights the similarities between such plantation work (post-abolition but with clear echoes of former slavery) and factory work as it is described in the Gobellis' modern-day boot factory. The comparison is not unique and had first been used in the 1830s by those advocating better living conditions for British factory workers in a quickly industrializing modern world.[147]

146 Even if the text might pretend to suggest a supernatural cause, Margaret's reaction to Harriet's story, her becoming "fainter and fainter" and feeling like she has been "scooped hollow" (21) as she hears it, needs to be connected with a painful, shocking recognition of the type of violence that were still perpetrated overseas only one or two decades earlier.

147 Famous nineteenth-century Leeds-born abolitionist Richard Oastler, for example, while rejoicing at the sight of Britain's gradual path towards the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, noted in 1830,

> "The pious and able champions of *negro* liberty and *colonial* rights should, if I mistake not, have gone farther than they did; or perhaps, to speak more correctly, before they had travelled so far as the West

In *The Blood of the Vampire*, the trading of coffee and the Gobellis' boot trade are described as different facets of the same increasingly global late nineteenth-century market and the slavery-like conditions of their victims. While coffee was picked by Henry Brandt's workers in Harriet's youth and shipped to Britain for grinding and, eventually, consumption, we learn that the French-style boots manufactured by the Gobelli business are also global commodities: "There is a manufactory in Germany, and another in England, where the boots and shoes are finished off. And then there is the shop in Oxford Street, where they are sold" (121). While, in the eyes of the Baroness, this Continental connection stresses the company's international flair, it reinforces, in the eyes of her British detractors in Heyst (and representatives of "old" money), like Elinor, her foreignness. Striking is the way in which the Baroness's harsh treatment of her workers is, just as was the case with Harriet's story, very casually discussed. When an old employee questions the authority of his employer's wife within the factory, she says,

> I took my stick and laid it on his back till he hollored again. He was out of the place before you could say Jack Robinson!' 'Ow will that do?' I said to the others, 'who else wants a taste of my stick before 'e 'll go!' But they all cleared out before

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> Indies, should, at least for a few moments, have sojourned in our own immediate neighbourhood, and have directed the attention of the meeting to scenes of misery, acts of oppression, and victims of slavery, even on the threshold of our homes. Let truth speak out, appalling as the statement may appear. The fact is true. Thousands of our fellow-creatures … the miserable inhabitants of a *Yorkshire town* … are this very moment existing in a state of slavery, *more horrid* than are the victims of that hellish system—"*colonial slavery*." (Oastler 214-215, emphasis in the original)

Meanwhile John Ruskin, writing at a time when British slavery is a thing of the past, also refers to the concept of slavery in his questioning of the morality behind commercial societies:

> "Alas! if read rightly, these perfectednesses are signs of a slavery in our England a thousand times more bitter and more degrading than that of the scourged African, or helot Greek. Men may be beaten, chained, tormented, yoked like cattle, slaughtered like summer flies, and yet remain in one sense, and the best sense, free. But to smother their souls within them, to blight and hew into rotting pollards, the suckling branches of their human intelligence, to make the flesh and skin which, after the worm's work on it, is to see God, into leathern thongs to yoke machinery with—this is to be slavemasters indeed." (Ruskin 285)

> I 'ad done speaking. I laughed till I was ill! But come along, children! It's time for dinner! (125)

While *The Blood of the Vampire* does not directly equate the slave-like conditions as witnessed by Harriet in Jamaica years earlier with the treatment of workers in the Gobelli factory, the way the two nonchalant descriptions partly mirror each other stresses the role that corporal punishment plays in both past and current global businesses. The apparent heartlessness of young Harriet, amused when child-workers "wriggle their legs under the whip and cry!" (20) finds an unsettling echo in the Baroness's own heartlessness as she ridicules the old man and violently strikes him with her stick. As demonstrated by her mistreatment of her son, as well as the animals around her (146-147), and her indifference to the sufferings of her neighbor (148), the Baroness, a contemporary financial "success story," is, despite her joviality, bent on cruelty.[148]

Belgian/British hypocrisy and the failure of a Gothic "cover-up"

The Belgian locus becomes in *The Blood of the Vampire* the surprising meeting point of (and clash between) characters embodying "old," aristocratic money or its lack and "new," global money rooted in exploitation abroad and at home. It also constitutes the quiet, apparently innocuous flip-side of colonialist atrocities committed in its name on the African continent, thus feeding into the novel's central theme of hypocrisy. Nevertheless, for most British tourists, Belgium would still have been mainly perceived as a mere stopover on their way to more prestigious destinations rather than a goal in itself (an image that persisted well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries). Once isolated from the context of Central African colonization and globalism, Marryat's use of Belgium at a time when it had become for most Victorians

148 Even her marital relation is at times described in terms of a master/slave power relation: "The Baron was completely under her thumb; more than that, he was servile in her presence … [he] wait[ed] upon his wife's wishes as if he were her slave" (6).

synonymous with provincial dullness and boredom still appears to clash with the promise of a Gothic supernatural narrative. This inability for touristic Belgium to excite is stressed by Elinor who, early on, is said "to find Heyst rather dull" (8). We are far from Haggard's African landscapes, Stoker's Transylvania, or Correlli's colorful Egyptian resorts. The first pages of the novel describe a mundane location, stripped of any hint of exoticism. While, a century earlier, devout Catholic Continental nations such as Italy or Spain had been the favorite settings of first-wave Gothic literature,[149] even Catholicism in *The Blood of the Vampire* is described as a mere source of quaint, touristic attractions. Far from causing the emotional turmoil experienced by Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, Catholic rituals are mainly curious, amusing, and somewhat commodified touristic events which, in the case of Elinor, one of the most conservative characters, are simply irritating. I suggest that Marryat's decision to set the first half of her novel in this seemingly uninspiring setting goes hand in hand with a process of narrative and contextual undermining of the novel's Gothic promise. This complex narrative approach helps Marryat tackle the hypocrisy I have so far described.

Andrew Maunder equates reading Marryat's early works to "watching a novelist mining a profitable sensational seam" (x). *The Blood of the Vampire*, written at the end of her life, certainly showcases the author's accumulated experience as a sensation writer.[150] Marryat's novel exhibits common sensationalist themes (scandalous love affairs, class tensions, unexpected deaths), but also elements of fin-de-siècle horror literature. The latter explains why critics have often read it alongside *Dracula*[151] or Lefanu's *Carmilla* (1872).[152] To date, all critics have been keen on approaching the novel's non-fantastical sensationalist themes and those alluding to the

149 As exemplified by the works of Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis. Similar examples of the use of the Belgian space in first-wave British Gothic fiction are less common, but not non-existent (see for example Thomas Grattan's later *The Heiress of Bruges* [1830]).
150 For more on Marryat's contribution as a writer of sensation fiction, see Depledge.
151 See Zieger.
152 For more on the subject, see Haefele-Thomas.

supernatural as participating equally and indiscriminately in exploring a single "sensational seam." But in an insightful observation, Ardel Haefele-Thomas warns against cataloging it as mere pulp fiction, underlines its somewhat fractured tone, and wonders if "[t]he only way readers would have known they were buying a vampire story would have been through the title" (108), even if she eventually still does not question the reality of the physical vampiric processes at play in the text.[153] Despite Marryat's longstanding interest in the occult, I take a different perspective and argue that she purposely created a text torn between Gothic clichés about Harriet's danger and a well-orchestrated derailment of supernatural motifs.

From the outset, Marryat invites her readers to question their expectations about her novel's genre, both through her use of Belgium as backdrop and, I argue, the creation of a somewhat fractured narrative voice desirous of letting the story espouse the supernatural, but prone to undermining this very design. Certainly, narratorial unreliability and generic uncertainty do not constitute uncommon traits of Gothic literature, and literary theorists like TzvetanTodorov show that, to be deemed "Gothic," a narrative might not even need to contain literally supernatural elements, as uncertainty about the existence of the latter might suffice. However, in *The Blood of the Vampire*, Marryat pushes generic uncertainty to extraordinary levels—not in ways meant to sustain doubt and encourage a fantastical reading of her plot but, on the contrary,

153 Recent works on *The Blood of the Vampire* have been apt at placing its narrative in the cultural and scientific debates of the late-Victorian period while leaving the nature of its Gothic genre unquestioned. So Octavia Davis analyzes the novel in light of Victorian scientific beliefs in "imaginism," as well as late nineteenth century expectations about race, social status and motherhood. Susan Zieger throws light on the relationship between vampirism and addiction, and on how to situate Harriet's racial ambiguity in the late Victorian context. Both Aspasia Stephanou and Sarah Willburn show the role of stereotypes about miscegenation and of scientific debates on heredity and race as an engine to the sensationalist plot. A study of racial stereotypes and food metaphors, is the crux of Mariaconcetta Costantini's analysis. Haefele-Thomas throws light on Marryat's treatment of gender and race, but also homosexuality, and she describes the novel as an example of late-Victorian "queer Gothic." Walston-Joseph analyzes Harriet's monstrosity as mirroring Marryat's pessimistic view of progress after the Emancipation Act. As is often the case with criticism of turn-of-the-century Gothic fiction (of which that of *Dracula* is a prominent example), Willburn, Stephanou, Zieger, Davis, Costantini, Haefele-Thomas and Walston-Joseph have all analyzed *The Blood of the Vampire* as willfully exploiting Victorian fears of the racialized and sexualized other through the fantastical in order to both address societal issues and strike readers' imagination.

as a device inviting readers to accumulate evidence against such inclination. While the novel certainly retains sensationalist components whose shock value is rooted in non-supernatural actions (the baroness's blackmail, the doctor's lack of professionalism, Ralph's infidelity, for example), it methodically undermines its Gothic promise. In fact, because this Gothic failure highlights the inhumanity and hypocrisy of these characters, the result is a reinforcement of the novel's sensationalist power and appeal on the social, financial and emotional levels.

To say more about this undermining and its connection to Belgium, let us consider some striking examples. Ralph and Harriet's romantic escapade to Heyst's "digue," for instance, is a pivotal moment for the novel's use of both sensational tropes and vampiric imagery. At this point of the narrative, Harriet does not know that Ralph is engaged and, as readers learn later, it is not the first time he is unfaithful to his fiancée. Their embrace is described as follows:

> He threw his arm about her waist. Her hot breath fanned his cheek.
>
> "Kiss me!" she murmured in a dreamy voice. Captain Pullen was not slow to accept the invitation so confidingly extended. What Englishman would be? He turned his face to Harriet Brandt's, and her full red lips met his own, in a long-drawn kiss, that seemed to sap his vitality. As he raised his head again, he felt faint and sick, but quickly recovering himself, he gave her a second kiss more passionate, if possible, than the first. (75)

Searching for clues of Harriet's presumed vampirism,[154] readers might find confirmation in Ralph's initial physical response. As when Stoker's Jonathan Harker responds to the Count's so-called brides with a "burning desire" to "kiss those red lips," Ralph feels "faint and sick," "sa[ped of] his vitality." Interestingly, however, Ralph's momentary weakness is followed by a

154 Marketing around the novel has not failed to exploit the imagery to this day (consider for example the use of Albert Peno's hyper-sexualized drawing *The Bat-woman* [1890] for the cover of the 2009 Valancourt Classics edition).

second kiss, “more passionate, if possible, than the first.” Unlike Harker, whose physical strength wanes, Ralph regains control. Thus, the passage drops one short, incisive allusion to vampirism as figured by Stoker only to negate it afterward. The next morning, as Ralph lingers around the Hotel and meets Doctor Phillips, he is described as “looking ill”:

> His face was chalky white, and his eyes seemed to have lost their brightness and colour.
>
> “Been up racketting late at night?” continued Doctor Phillips. “What is Miss Leyton about, not to look after you better?”
>
> “No, indeed, Doctor,” replied the young man with a smile, “I am sure my sister-in-law will testify to the good hours I have kept since here. But I have a headache this morning—a rather bad one,” he added, with his hand to the nape of his neck. (77)

Once again Marryat’s narrator seems to reinforce a fantastical reading of a supposedly power-draining Harriet, including chalky skin and a possibly painful neck. What readers know, however, is that Ralph has indeed been “racketting late at night,” making it possible that his visible fatigue stems from his late-night escapade. As the novel baits its readership with somewhat clichéd allusions to vampirism only to provide rational explanation, it invites us to ponder the moral flaws of the characters surrounding Harriet.

Marryat’s narrator likewise uses clichéd metaphors that flag Harriet as a stereotypical *femme fatale*. Indeed, at times, *The Blood of the Vampire* seems to try too hard to meet the criteria identified by scholars of late-Victorian culture like Bram Dijkstra or Elizabeth Menon. The use of animal imagery is a case in point: Harriet is said “to hypnotise [Margaret] as the snake is said to hypnotise the bird” (35); touching Ralph's hand “seemed to rouse all the animal in [her]

blood" (74); she is a black cat (93), "a tigress" (109, 130), a "snake" (159), and a "spider" (163). Similarly, descriptions of her physical appearance—the massive hair, flushed face, and disordered accessories—are meant to evoke uncontrolled sexuality just as her appetite for food suggests insatiability.[155] As the plot increasingly casts doubt on Harriet as vampire or *femme fatale*, the imagery nevertheless continues: Harriet's "dark eyes," the narrator tells us, "were still looking for their prey, and the restless lips were incessantly twitching and moving one over the other" (155), a type of characterization that appears increasingly out of place. In this way, Marryat creates a narrator at odds with the debunking realism at play in the narrative. By letting her novel's narrator mimic the masculine voice of scientific authority that late-Victorian readers of Gothic knew so well, Marryat might seem to temporarily allow readers to embrace a racist and misogynist view of her main character. She does so, however, while also actively leaving ample invitations to question these very prejudices.[156]

Another example concerns the deaths of Ethel, Bobby and Anthony. On the surface, these deaths seem to point to her guilt as a fantastical energy-sucking vampire. Harriet herself becomes confused by these strange coincidences. But the deaths are never conclusively connected to vampirism. Dr. Phillips describes one young victim, Ethel, as "in the condition of a child who has been exercised and excited and hurried from place to place, far beyond what she is able to bear," a plausible diagnosis for a baby who has been traveling internationally. Her pain "may rise from internal causes" (87), he concedes. It is only later in response to hearing about Harriet, that the doctor suddenly connects Ethel's death with the quadroon's presence, coloring Baroness

155 See for example, the early description of her "devour[ing] her food with avidity and enjoyment" (4) or her fondness for chocolate (40).

156 Failing to detect this duplicity has spurred critics to consider the novel to be like "most commercial fiction [in that it] too much embodies or replicates the social and scientific conventions of its day rather than critiquing or at least illuminating them" (Eldridge 893) or to describe it as a "politically retrograde narrative" (Zieger 199) while it offers clues to be read, I argue, in quite the opposite way.

Gobelli's own interpretation of Bobby's death.[157] But earlier the novel repeatedly described her son's physical and mental weakness as a result of his mother's mistreatment and made a point of presenting Harriet as his ally. Although the narrator unconvincingly describes this friendship in the clichéd terms of a *femme fatale* toying with prey ("The tigress deprived of blood will sometimes condescend to milder food" [109]), it simultaneously portrays Bobby as a sickly, "anoemic" and "very delicate" young man of sensitive nature and "never without a husky cough" (100), even before his heart is broken by unrequited love for Harriet. The"love-sick schoolboy" who has become "terribly jealous" of Anthony (179) disappears into his room, and is found dead on his bed a few hours later. Although the Baroness blames the "poisonous, wicked" (187) Harriet, evoking the rumors about her past, the doctor guesses that a post mortem examination will "probably detect hidden mischief in the heart and lungs" (191). The novel increasingly invites its readers to experience the scene's sensationalism as grounded in a rational explanation, suicide, instead of a fantastical one.

Finally, the circumstances surrounding Anthony's death similarly oscillate between confirmation and counter-confirmation. Anthony's remark that Harriet is "draw[ing] [his] very life away" (221) has been enough to convince critics of the novel that fantastical powers are indeed at play. But the comment is uttered when Anthony is considering making Harriet his muse, the "next heroine" of his writings. Far from playing the *femme fatale*, she is grateful and humble, "hid[ding] her face upon his breast," murmuring, "I am not good enough, not pretty enough! Your heroines should be perfect!" Anthony, declaring that he prefers his heroines "to be of flesh and blood, like you" then "stoop[s] his head and kisse[s] her *passionately*" (221, emphasis mine). It is then that Anthony whispers his somewhat odd declaration of love which

157 The theme of contagion, popular in Gothic fiction, is used here by Marryat to illustrate the dangerous consequences of rumors as much as (if not more than) it is used to imply the contagious threat Harriet might pose.

has a lot more to do with Harriet's power to inspire him as an artist and a man than a sudden admission of physical or mental weakness. Indeed, in the following pages, the couple is shown in the whirlwind of their passion for each other: their trip is so intellectually engrossing that husband and wife are often "both completely tired" (221). The night before his death, Anthony is "too sleepy to talk," but "Harriet was also tired" (223).[158]

Thus *The Blood of the Vampire* fulfills the generic requirements of a sensational novel while merely toying with the premise of a Gothic tale of supernatural vampirism. In doing so, the novel impugns the credibility of the characters who actively encourage this Gothic reading and to some degree undermines its own narrative voice. By encouraging her readers to question the agenda behind these imputations, Marryat unveils the racist, classist, and misogynistic prejudices that drive the characters' and the narrator's duplicity. In a parallel process, Belgium, in spite of its potential associations with the Gothic, proves inadequate as a background for a fantastical narrative, rooted as it is in the touristic, modern, commercial and global realities of its time. This ambiguous position of touristic, coastal Belgium as a backdrop meant to signal the dangers of fantastical projections and, more generally, the possible relations between "narratives" (about the Other as embodied in Harriet), spectacles, and audiences' impressionability is highlighted in the part of the novel taking place in Brussels, right before its characters travel back to Britain. Indeed, while Heyst constitutes the main Belgian background of *Blood of the Vampire*, Brussels plays a significant role as well. Chapter 9, which describes Harriet and the Gobellis' visit to the

158 Anthony's last two conversation topics shed light on the actual dynamic between the two lovers, as well as possible reasons for his death. First, Anthony jokes that Harriet is "far more liable to fall sick of the two," and he does not "think [Harriet's] beautiful little body has much strength to sustain it" (223). In an ironic reversal, his worries are thus not for his own lack of strength, but for that of his wife. Second, Anthony ponders "whether a trip to Australia or America would not do [them] both more good than lingering about these mild, warm places" (222) and he nervously adds that Italian towns "are famous for typhoid and malarial fevers" (223). While connecting Anthony's death to these diseases would constitute an interpretative leap, their mention, as well as the information that, in Florence, "the law does not permit a mourner to lament his Dead for more than four-and-twenty hours" (one assumes, to avoid contagion), coupled with early comments on Anthony's age and the physical tiredness of the couple, hints that the supernatural explanation might again be the least plausible.

Belgian capital, precipitates Harriet's unexpected isolation from Ralph, Bobby's infatuation for Harriet, the death of baby Ethel, and the sudden departure of the British contingent. Just as Brontë did in both of her Belgian novels, Marryat shows an astute knowledge of the capital, characterizing numerous landmarks with great accuracy. But more than merely adding local flavor, Marryat's Brussels chapter uses Belgian cultural landmarks to amplify key themes as well as a meta-textual reflection on sensationalism and the Gothic in general.

The choice of the Wiertz Museum as the setting for a detailed description of Harriet and Bobby's excursion is a case in point. The artist's studio turned museum, home of paintings by Belgian artist Antoine Wiertz (1806-1865), was well-known to nineteenth century tourists. Wiertz, a painter who rose to fame from a poor family background, was heavily influenced by both Romantic and Academic arts, often mixing classical and philosophical themes while exhibiting a Romantic taste for the grandiose and the macabre. The latter partly informs the narrator's use of his works to narrate Harriet and Bobby's visit: for most critics, Harriet's fascination with some of Wiertz's most gruesome paintings appears to confirm her status as a suspected vampire.[159] On closer inspection, however, the episode equally supports a realist counter-narrative in part by suggesting the impact that Wiertz's works might have on a nineteenth-century tourist like Harriet.

159 See Hammack, "Harriet finds herself attracted to the most violent and gory paintings by Antoine Joseph Wiertz, a Belgian romantic known for morbid depictions of decapitation" (890).

Figure 2 - Antoine Wiertz, *Faim, Folie et Crime* (1853)

Figure 3 - Antoine Wiertz, *Le Suicide* (1854)

Harriet is described as standing "enwrapt" before two paintings: one of "the mother in a time of famine devouring her child" and one "of the Suicide between his good and evil angels" (102). The first, known as *Faim, Folie et Crime* (*Hunger, Madness and Crime* [1853]), calls to mind Baroness Gobelli's relation to a son whom she has underfed[160] as well as the psychological shock she experiences upon his death. *Le Suicide* (1854), shows a man shooting himself in the mouth, surrounded by his good and evil angels, beside a table atop which a note with his last words lies. This painting anticipates the circumstances of Bobby's death, as well as the novel's ending and Harriet's own suicide note. In this light, Harriet's supposedly morbid fascination with these works invites readers to dwell on scenes that foreshadow upcoming events and in which, as I have shown, the fantastical actually plays no part.

It is worth noting that Harriet initially plans to visit the Académie des Beaux Arts and the Cathedral of Sainte Gudule when Ralph can join her. We learn that the latter is "not a great lover

160 It is telling that both the Baroness and Margaret are characterized as inadequate mother figures in the novel. The Baroness is clearly physically and mentally abusing her son, while Margaret is described as delegating maternal supervision to others (including Harriet). Both children will die.

of painting in general" (102) and the visit to the Musée des Beaux Arts or the Cathedral of Sainte Gudule (which house the more conventional artworks) never takes place. Harriet is at first disappointed by the museum's size ("Is this the Wiertz Museum? I thought it would be a much grander place!" [101]), but she soon becomes so "entranced" and "enraptured" that she "determines to return the following morning … to gaze once more upon those inimitable figures" (102). I argue that her reaction has less to do with an interest in the macabre and more with the kind of museum Marryat chooses as her setting. Indeed, Antoine Wiertz, while questioned for his level of taste and talent by contemporary and later critics (most famously Baudelaire), was a savvy artist who managed—through an acute understanding of the intersections between the world of art and politics—to raise himself to the status of a national icon. His decision to bequeath his studio to the new Belgian state on the condition that it be kept free and open to the public was well known at the time[161]—a one-of-a-kind form of self-canonization which Belgian cultural and political authorities still scratch their heads over.[162]

161 A fact that Marryat points out when Bobby explain to Harriet that this "is the house Wiertz lived in, and he left it with all his pictures to the Belgian Government on condition they kept it just as it was" (101).
162 The maintenance of the now little-known museum, with its dozen of visitors a day, regularly resurfaces in the news as the example of an apparently insolvable money pit, and threats to close it or relocate its contents never materialize (https://www.rtbf.be/info/regions/detail_le-musee-wiertz-n-accueille-qu-une-quinzaine-de-visiteurs-chaque-jour)

Figure 4 - A current inside view of the Wiertz Museum,
the set-up of which has remained relatively unchanged for the past century.

Wiertz excelled at impressing the public through colossal canvasses that luridly treated their subjects. While the latter were often somewhat controversial, the museum itself was also purposefully arranged to evoke a kind of freak show, as art historian Jack Post explains:

> Contemporaries … compared his exhibition practices with those of cheap traveling shows, fairs, wax museums or the panorama. Wiertz' attitude was indeed very ambiguous. On the one hand he wanted to be a painter of stature, a Rubens or Raphael and on the other hand he made every effort to entertain his public as a nineteenth century showman. … The modern steel and glass construction of the sky-light in the main exhibition hall, built to shed an even-tempered light in his studio, was used to create theatrical lighting effects as nineteenth century visitors report. (42)

Thus Harriet's enthusiasm for this place and its artifacts is less about any natural propensity for the macabre than about her position as a naïve tourist entrapped by an attention-grabbing spectacle. As such, the Wiertz episode documents the power of sensational arts to impress the imaginations of their audiences. In self-reflexive fashion, the novel suggests that Wiertz's grotesque subjects enthrall an unprepared audience, just as Marryat's readers might respond to hints of the supernatural. Yet, just as the novel's refusal to confirm Gothic tropes implies the questionable morality of certain characters and voices, so Wiertz's paintings are aesthetically troubling. In this surprising mise-en-abîme, Marryat's choice of this Belgian location feeds the Gothic imagination of her readers while simultaneously sending clear signals about the artificiality behind such exaggerated forms.[163]

Yet another important feature of the Belgian location concerns its impact on the characterization of the three most prominent male figures, be it through their response to this Belgian environment, or the ways in which they navigate Belgian and British spaces. Each of these three characters, Doctor Phillips, Ralph Pullen and Anthony Pennel, comes in close contact with Harriet and amplifies in his own ways the novel's sensational effects. Each character also navigates a distinct geographical area. Phillips, whom Harriet meets in Belgium, is shown an experienced and authoritative navigator of space in both Belgium and Britain. Ralph, by contrast, is limited to the space of Heyst: he neither visits Brussels nor resurfaces in the British half of the novel. Anthony conversely never appears in Belgium.

163 Closely connected to this theme, Marryat further reveals her knowledge of Brussels, illustrates her character's questionable cultivation and expends on the theme of artificiality when the Baroness explain, "[W]e'll all go to the theater together to-morrow night. I've taken five seats for the Alcazar which the Captain said was the house he liked best in Brussels" (102). This mention of the Alcazar Theatre reinforces the themes of showmanship and artifice. This popular, touristic place was known for its over-the-top, gaudy architecture, its light entertainment (emulating the Parisian "French Can-Can"). A year before *The Blood of the Vampire* and a few months after a Parisian premiere, it housed the first cinematographic presentations of the Frères Lumières in Belgium. Unlike more "serious" classical theatrical performances, the Alcazar Theater offered escapist touristic entertainment where form and artifice prevailed over substance.

As I interpret it, the main role of Doctor Phillips is to activate the British tourists' and—temporarily—the readers' suspicion that Harriet might be a fantastical character. The fact that he must be summoned from Britain to Heyst to check on the health of baby Ethel distinguishes him from the other travelers and positions him as both an Englishman and a figure of cosmopolitan medical authority. It also subtly reinforces the notion of Belgium as foreign and untrustworthy from the British point of view ("I have not much faith in Belgian doctors," states Margaret, "Their pharmacopoeia is quite different from ours" [54]). Readers of *Dracula* will be tempted to liken Phillips to Stoker's Van Helsing. Extending this comparison, we notice that, like Dracula, Harriet is a foreign-born figure who, after finding her way into Britain, is identified by a man of science as a vampire, after which she is harassed by him and his allies. Like Dracula (and despite Anthony's efforts), Harriet, whom one could also easily interpret as some embodiment of a return of the (colonial) repressed, is also forced to cross the Channel one last time, eventually meeting her death on the Continent. But these similarities are superficial. While Van Helsing's authority seems unshakeable, I have already suggested that Marryat's doctor is shown to be not only clearly prejudiced, but also highly inconsistent; he is never quite convincing when portraying Harriet either as a female hysteric or as a vampire.[164] The novel's description of her visit to his office exhibits a purposeful blurring of the boundaries between the doctor and the omniscient narrator by occasionally merging their voices.[165] I argue that Marryat's goal was not to invite her readers to fully embrace such views since, as Macfie senses, *The Blood*

164 When Phillips, used to more docility from his female patients, is pressed by Harriet's doubts and distress, he offers responses are both confused and contradictory, going from chastising Harriet for considering a mere "superstition" as an explanation for her case to describing this same explanation as "a subject … undoubtedly true," while simultaneously admitting its unscientific nature (195). Just as with many doctors of Victorian Gothic fiction, the field of his expertise expands beyond the confines of conventional science to include esoteric explanations. Phillips is reminiscent of characters like Van Helsing in *Dracula* or Phillips in Machen's *Great God Pan*. Their questionable methods are, Tabita Sparks explains, to be connected with "a public disenchantment with science and the methodologies associated with the scientific Enlightenment" and an increasing questioning of the morality of scientific authority (112).

165 As Macfie has argued, "What is most extraordinary about *The Blood of the Vampire* is the way in which the narrator's voice…embraces the doctor's stereotype of the sadistic and sensual mixed-race woman" (62-63).

of the Vampire's "narrative is unable to suppress opposing voices" (63-64)—instead, these "opposing voices" throw light on the novel's Gothic cover-up.[166] Just as readers discover that Baroness's communications with supernatural forces are a scam used to blackmail others, so they eventually realize that the doctor's so-called scientific explanations, whether based on eugenics or sexism, are a means of excluding mixed-race people from white British social circles.

At one point, Phillips attempts to persuade Harriet that "with a fortune at [her] command," she has no reason to embark on that "very over-rated institution of matrimony … There is no real reason— medical or legal—why you should not choose for yourself in the matter!" (196). Interestingly, Phillips describes here the possible pleasures that Harriet might enjoy as a wealthy, independent woman. Possible vampirism ceases to matter, and, while marriage, he tells her, does not bring happiness, money can. Once again, the characters who accuse Harriet of vampirism are also the most mercenary and, like capital itself, the most mobile. This observation stresses the centrality of the themes of wealth and capitalist enterprise in the novel, in particular the exaggerated interest of some characters in money—including Harriet's.[167] The inescapable, solid presence of the morally-bankrupt, yet financially successful Doctor Phillips in the novel comfortably navigating both Belgian and British chapters alerts readers that

166 In her analysis of the novel, Haefele-Thomas expanded on the existence of such tensions when she pointed to "narrative fluctuation produc[ing] the novel's unusual tone," (119) and talked about the introduction of Anthony Pennell into the story as follows: "the narrator's description of Pennell is curious … because there seems to be a slippage in the novel at the structural level. On the one hand, the voice comes across with admiration for Pennell and his endeavours. At the same time, a judgmental tone creeps in" (118). Her comments are insightful but need to be expanded, as she inscribes these "transgressions of narrative voice" as reflective of Marryat's "Gothic framework" (118), while I analyze them as symptomatic of Marryat's over-arching plan to question this very framework and I connect instead the sensationalist nature of her work to the unjust treatment of Harriet by both its characters and its narrator.

167 Harriet, who was shown spending money in Heyst to buy the friendship of those around her, is dissatisfied by the doctor's response. Phillips "gaily" (196) points that all she needs to do is avoid contact with those she loves. The use of the qualifier "gaily" highlights the doctor's lack of professionalism and empathy in light of the condition supposedly afflicting Harriet, and is echoed by his effort to sigh "professionally" (191) after checking on Bobby's dead body. It reveals his views that human love and interaction are not necessary to live a lucrative and socially acceptable life.

Harriet's victimization, rooted in racial prejudices and greed, is unlikely to stop regardless of which side of the Channel she is on.

Before becoming the victim of the doctor's rumors, Harriet starts the novel as the victim of Ralph's manipulation and his unfaithfulness to Elinor. While Ralph is cast by both the narrator and the other characters (in particular Anthony and Margaret) in a negative light, it is enlightening to contrast his handling of Harriet's racial difference with that of other characters. Though his duplicitous conduct is scandalous and sensational, it is telling that his attraction to Harriet seems genuine. As I have shown, Ralph's open-mindedness is described as enabled by a non-British location facilitating his mingling with Harriet and the Gobellis ("one does things abroad that one would not dream of doing in England," [91] he explains). As a free-spirit, Ralph rejects the doctor's theories on "the consequences of heredity" (85) and flippantly asks after hearing reports on her parents, "What has this terrible story got to do with Miss Brandt?" (93) The romance that follows uses Belgium's diversely populated coast line as a geographically liminal location for a tenuous acceptance of racial otherness—an openness that extends to Ralph's comparative appreciation of his Belgian environment. As a boy, the somewhat turbulent Ralph spent his school years in the Belgian capital: "I was placed at Mr. Jackson's English school there, in order that I might learn French, but I'm afraid that was the last thing I acquired" (68). In contrast to the other British characters, during Heyst's street celebrations, he refuses to "stand by, like a British tourist" (68) and joins in, while Elinor and Margaret remain on their balcony (72); and while the Baroness pokes fun at a Catholic procession, he declares, "I have been taught to respect every religion that is followed with sincerity" (57). Ralph and Harriet's common ability to show genuine interest in such local customs sharply contrasts with Margaret and Elinor's criticism. On the other hand, Ralph's attraction to Harriet simultaneously smacks of

erotic investment in a mixed-race woman ("Ah! A drop of Creole blood in her then, I daresay! You never see such eyes in an English face!" [59]) and he proves extremely quick to forget her. While, in the first part of the novel, Belgium helps bring two free spirits together, it ultimately turns into the backdrop of a failed romance and exposes the British characters' inability to develop a genuine appreciation of the Other.

The introduction of Anthony Pennell in the "British" half of the novel sheds even more light on the racial prejudices motivating the actions of the other British characters. Under the impressions left on him by Phillips and Elinor, Anthony is curious to meet Harriet, whom "he pictured … to himself as a whitey-brown young woman with thick lips and rolling eyes." (153) But when finally meeting her, he is dumbstruck:

> Mr. Pennell said nothing—he was too much startled to speak. This, Harriet Brandt —this lovely girl, the quadroon of whom both Doctor Phillips and Mrs. Pullen had spoken so disparagingly? … O! they must be fools and blind—or he was dreaming!" (156-157)

Anthony expresses his discontent to Elinor: "I should never have recognized Miss Brandt from your description of her! You led me to expect a gauche schoolgirl, a half-tamed savage, or a juvenile virago. And I am bound to say that she struck me as belonging to none of the species" (166).[168] Through Anthony, Marryat refuses to turn Harriet into a caricatural wealthy mixed-race woman like Thackeray's Miss Swartz. Harriet, with her "colourless but clear" skin (4) bears no visible racial marker. With the perspective of someone only acquainted with the Belgian events through hearsay, Anthony highlights the distorting power of rumors. Capable of critical distance,

168 The use of the word "virago" is directly reminiscent of the stereotypical language used by both Doctor Phillips and the narrative voice when imagining Harriet as a sexually dangerous femme fatale.

he becomes for the reader a more reliable judge of Harriet than any other characters—even more reliable than the narrative voice itself.

Anthony sets himself apart through his humanistic approach to the Other. His response to Margaret's opinion of the young woman's racial background is a case in point:

> "She is in a most unfortunate position for a young girl," remarked Margaret, "left parentless, with money at her command, and in a strange country! And with the strange stigma attached to her birth—"
>
> "I don't believe in stigmas being attached to one's birth," returned [Anthony] Pennell hastily, "the only stigmas worth thinking about, are those we bring upon ourselves by our misconduct—such a one, for instance, as my cousin Ralph has done with regard to Miss Brandt! I would rather be in her shoes than his..." (168-169)

Even Margaret, otherwise a model of sympathy, is rebuked by Anthony's insights on race and social class. Just as Belgium highlights the discomfort and hypocrisy of the novel's British characters when forced to mingle together, Anthony serves, in Britain, to highlight how their (and the narrator's) vision of Harriet is colored by prejudices. Unlike Ralph's opportunism, Anthony's sympathy towards Harriet is not simply based on his growing amorous interest, but his beliefs are grounded on a specific view that he has been harboring over the years as a socialist writer:

> Anthony Pennell was a Socialist in the best and truest sense of the word. He loved his fellow creatures, both high and low, better than he loved himself. He wanted all to share alike—to be equally happy, equally comfortable—to help and be helped, to rest and depend upon one another. He knew that the dream was only a

> dream—that it would never be fulfilled in his time, nor any other; that some men would be rich and some poor as long as the world lasts … What little Pennell could do, however, to prove that his theories were not mere talk, he did. … Money was not the only thing which his fellow creatures required—they wanted love, sympathy, kindness, and consideration—and these he gave also, wherever he found there was need. He set his face pertinaciously against all scandal and back-biting, and waged a perpetual warfare against the tyranny of men over women... (175-176)

The socialist-humanist Anthony is a believer in equal rights, a proto-feminist,[169] a philanthropist, and a man of both thoughts and actions. Anthony insists that "his fellow creatures required … love, sympathy, kindness, and consideration," characteristics lacking from all other major British characters who place money and social status over love. He is Harriet's financial and intellectual equal, undermining her representation as a predator.

While the Belgian section was ruled by rumors and scandals, a more "rational" and "humane" reading of Harriet's character develops in the British section through the use of Anthony. Readers might be tempted to view Belgium as just the temporary stage for a very "un-British" lapse of common sense. However, the novel's ending and the other characters' (as well as the narrator's) refusal to embrace Anthony's humanist point-of-view emphasizes their bigotry and demonstrates that prejudices persist on both sides of the Channel. The death of Harriet and

169 In an interesting reversal of perspective, Anthony deplores that "just because she had a dark stream mingling with her blood, just because she needed the more sympathy and kindness, the more protection and courtesy, she should be considered fit prey for the sensualist—a fit subject to wipe men's feet upon!" (177) Unlike Phillips and, at times, the authorial voice itself, who all read in Harriet's behavior signs of extreme sensuality reminiscent of (racialized) femmes fatales, Anthony unveils Ralph's own sensualist proclivities. The animal imagery discussed earlier, thus far applied to Harriet, is mirrored back onto the people who have been seeking her isolation. Harriet is the actual "prey" in these interactions, the victim of Ralph's infidelity, of Baroness Gobelli's interest in her finances, of Elinor's disproportionate jealousy, and of the doctor's pseudo-science. Anthony's indignation also highlights the fact that Harriet is doubly prejudiced against and mishandled as both as a woman and a person of color.

Anthony, while seemingly offering narrative closure to the vampiric "threat" within a Gothic reading of the plot, has pessimistic implications once the artificiality of the various appeals to the fantastical is revealed. The Belgian setting in the novel might have contributed to making Harriet and Ralph's encounter possible, but it never disabled racial prejudice. Given the contemporary history of Belgium as a global power and its appearance of respectability, this trans-Channel setting fosters its own forms of hypocrisy and violence against the Other. Unlike Ralph's defense of Harriet, which, while colored by sympathy, is undermined by his objectification of both Harriet and Elinor, Anthony's defense, rooted in true humanism, seems to promise a more just treatment of the Other. Ultimately, however, such promise also remains unfulfilled.

For this reason, parts of Anthony's relation with Harriet might remind us of M. Paul and Lucy's relationship in Brontë's *Villette.* Brontë chose a fictionalized Belgium, stripped of its geopolitical markers, as setting for her novel and used it as experimental ground to tackle a "different" kind of relation between the British and the Continental (and religious) Other. Marryat's choice of a Belgian backdrop tainted by its own hypocrisy and colonial violence, conversely shows that, while global economics and tourism might bring more and more people of various social, cultural and racial backgrounds geographically "together," devastating prejudices, like people or capital, also travel fast. Ralph's superficiality is exposed by how quickly he gives up on his relation with Harriet. While Brontë offered a much more complex view of the changes operating in M. Paul, shown working through and beyond a resistance to Lucy's Protestant otherness, Marryat creates in Anthony a rather two-dimensional character that comes with a set of humanistic convictions that sometimes verge on the theoretical. Nonetheless, he views Harriet very differently than the other British characters, and seems to rekindle the promise of a prejudice-free relationship. In *Villette*, the unexpected death of M. Paul highlights

Brontë's belief that the relation between her two characters could only belong to the realm of the Ideal, a hopeful vision unaffected by contemporaneity only by its nature as a mere memory of things past. Similarly, in *The Blood of the Vampire*, Marryat's decision to kill off the only character sympathetic to Harriet's unfair treatment and to precipitate the latter's suicide dramatically underlines the "impossibility" of such relation. Despite the presence of Anthony as an embodiment of rising humanistic ideals in Britain, the country, as a backdrop placed side-by-side with Belgium, proves an equally intolerant locale for such experimentation. When the two lovers flee to Italy, hoping that it might be distant enough for their unique form of love to bloom, it is already too late. Marryat shows that, in an increasingly globalizing world, prejudices and their effects will follow you. And the readers are left to ponder the validity of Anthony's suspicion that, maybe, a trip to the younger nations of "Australia or America," seemingly more open to multiculturalism, would indeed truly "do [them] both more good" (222). Eventually, the two characters' deaths in *The Blood of the Vampire* negate the possibilities of an inter-cultural, inter-racial relation to the Other based on respect, equality and an understanding of each other's differences within an imaginary realm of possibilities not yet realizable, be it in Belgium, Britain, or elsewhere.

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