ABSTRACT

Is trauma a private or public experience? How do larger moments of historical, national, and imperial upheaval reverberate on the level of the individual? How readily do we forget a violent past, despite the traces that wash up on the textual margins? In this project I move against the critical current that posits Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853) as an autobiographical work. Although the parallels between the lives of Brontë and Lucy Snowe are perhaps tempting—much like her protagonist, Brontë leaves England for the continent, teaches English at a boarding school, and falls in love with a spirited, temperamental instructor—such an autobiographical reading imposes limits upon the possible interpretations of two traumatic scenes in the novel, Lucy’s journey to the continent and the (supposed) death of Monsieur Paul Emmanuel. Against an autobiographical backdrop, these two scenes read as simple textual symptoms of Brontë’s homesickness and unrequited love. By contrast, I place Brontë’s work in a longer, wider historical context, considering the uses and limits of framing *Villette* as a shipwreck novel. I contend that the flotsam and jetsam of a traumatic past—specifically, the violence of the British slave trade in the West Indies and the upheaval of the 1848 European revolutions—surface in Lucy’s pain and M. Paul’s apparent death. At stake in my project is the status of history: in *Villette*, I believe that history functions as an “open secret” (à la D. A. Miller), an absent-yet-present, repressed-yet-pervasive knowledge of the past that haunts the present.
**Shipwreck, Slavery, Revolution: History as the Open Secret in Charlotte Brontë’s Villette**

In an 1853 letter to one of her publishers, Charlotte Brontë offers a cryptic description of the concluding shipwreck in *Villette* (1853). Two inquisitive readers, Lady Harriet Elizabeth St. Clair and Dinah Mary Mulock, had requested of her “exact and authentic information respecting the fate of M. Paul Emanuel!![sic].” Brontë replies with an answer “so worded as to leave the matter pretty much where it was. Since the little puzzle amuses the ‘ladies’ it would be a pity to spoil their sport by giving them the key.”¹ What is the secret to this “little puzzle,” and what kind of “key” would unlock it? Brontë’s metaphor suggests that the locking mechanism is rather complex: the puzzle cannot be solved without a key. Put differently, I believe that what is hidden in and by the shipwreck is more than just “Paul lives” or “Paul dies.” Adding to this mystery is an earlier shipwreck, another little puzzle full of gaps, allusions, and oblique metaphors.

In this project I propose that history is the key to Brontë’s two little puzzles. This sounds like a very simple answer—and, to a degree, it is. At the most basic level, my project seeks to place *Villette* within a longer, wider historical context. I argue that the novel possesses an acute political and historical awareness of the long nineteenth century. Through a close analysis of the two traumatic scenes of shipwreck—Lucy Snowe’s journey to the continent and the supposed death of M. Paul Emmanuel—I place the seemingly private world of *Villette* alongside two public, traumatic discourses, slavery and revolution. In the process, I raise questions about the relationship between trauma, memory, secrecy, and narration. Is trauma a private or public experience? How do larger moments of historical, national, and imperial upheaval reverberate on the level of the individual? How readily do we forget a violent past, despite the traces that wash up on the textual margins? I attempt to put literary history in conversation with trauma studies, especially ideas of the reenactment of trauma and trauma’s role in shaping individual and/or
collective identity. In a historical novel—or, perhaps more accurately, a novel awash with historical wreckage—what is the relationship between trauma and narration? Framed by such questions, the historical key to Brontë’s two little puzzles becomes quite a complex apparatus. This is more than just a game of spot-the-reference. Instead, my project moves toward a methodology that reads history from traces, fragments, allusions, and echoes. In dealing with the traumas of the past, Lucy, Brontë, and I all engage with what Leo Costello dubs the “limits of representation, a mode of composition through decomposition wherein the unspeakable is rendered incomplete; no complex unity can be (re)assembled from this “dissolution.” For any attempt to reconstruct the past—especially a traumatic past—is like any attempt to hold water in our hands. Things slip through our fingers. Every representation effects transformation; every transformation (re)enacts loss. Yet the past is always already present; a concealed-yet-felt history lurks just below the surface of representation.

At stake, therefore, in my project is the status of history. I believe that in Villette history functions as an “open secret” (á la D. A. Miller), an absent-yet-present, repressed-yet-pervasive knowledge of the past that haunts the present. The open secret is “secret” knowledge that is already known—or perhaps even known to be known—either directly or through intuition. Miller describes the secret as an apparatus for manufacturing significance. To fully tell the secret suggests that there is nothing special to hide, but to fully keep the secret prevents anyone from knowing that there is something to hide. Hence the open secret is a paradox—something that everyone knows but still operates under the sign of secrecy. Miller’s idea of the open secret thus raises questions about situations where the need to “keep secret” takes precedence over the particular secret itself. The question is not “[w]hat does secrecy cover?” but rather “[w]hat takes secrecy for its field of operations?” In this project I will suggest that the answer to this latter
question is history. A longer, wider history always already lies just beneath the surface of *Villette*, yet it can only appear through a glass darkly, through traces, allusions, and echoes. Such an endeavor asks us to reconsider the role of simultaneity in literary history. Brontë’s writing and Lucy’s narration occur “at the same time” as certain historical events—but what does this mean for their relationship? In short, what are the poetics of simultaneity?

This paper also requires me to negotiate the treacherous waters between the author and the narrator. While my argument is not autobiographical *per se*, I have structured my project around Brontë. Indeed, she is the *arkhē* to my archive of materials here, the nodal point around which I have built my analysis. I have searched for materials written at or around the same time as *Villette* and considered what texts Brontë herself may have read. My aim, however, is not to reproduce or reconstruct Brontë’s psyche but rather deploy simultaneity as an analytical tool. I use Brontë’s biography to read not inwards into her private life but outwards into a longer, wider public context. By doing so, I hope to move against the critical current that posits *Villette* as an autobiographical work. Scholars rarely place *Villette* within its historical context. Many scholars want to read the novel autobiographically. To their credit, the parallels between the lives of Brontë and Lucy are indeed tempting: much like her protagonist, Brontë leaves England for the continent, teaches English at a boarding school, and fall in love with (but never marries) a spirited, temperamental instructor. Yet such an autobiographical reading imposes limits upon the possible interpretations of the two traumatic shipwreck scenes. Against an autobiographical backdrop, these two episodes read as simple textual symptoms of Brontë’s homesickness and unrequited love. But I do not believe the puzzles can be solved so easily. A biographical approach can conceal as much as it reveals.
For a wider world can be seen through *Villette*. As Heather Glen observes, only recently have critics begun to “challenge the view that [Brontë’s] novels speak simply of ‘private experience.’” Her works are “much more aware of and responsive to a multifarious and changing early nineteenth-century world.” Similarly, Alexandra Lewis, discussing current trends in Brontë scholarship, writes that “an interest in transatlantic exchanges is steadily building.” Yet the majority of these new endeavors, regardless of critical background—new historicism, feminism, postcolonialism, trauma studies, et al.—focus upon Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), especially the scene of the “red room” or the figure of Bertha Mason. There remains what Glen calls a “recalcitrance” to *Villette*, a way in which the novel resists attempts to understand it. Although scholars such as David Sandner acknowledge that the two shipwreck scenes are “key positions in the novel,” only a handful of critics over the last seventy years have addressed at length the importance of those passages. I hope to address some of these issues here. I will look not inwards to Brontë but outwards to history. I place *Villette* in a longer, wider historical context, considering the uses and limits of reading the novel as a shipwreck narrative. I contend that the flotsam and jetsam of a traumatic past—specifically, the violence of the slave trade in the West Indies and the upheaval of contemporary revolutions (especially the series of European revolutions in 1848)—surface in Lucy’s submerged pain and Paul’s apparent death. By reading *Villette* alongside several nineteenth-century periodicals, histories of West Indian slavery and the French Revolution, selected paintings by J. M. W. Turner, and other mid-nineteenth century literary and visual representations of traumatic shipwreck, slavery, and revolution, I argue that history is the open secret of *Villette*. 
SHIPWRECK I: *VILLETTE* AND THE SLAVE SHIP

The age of sail was awash with shipwreck. Discussing the hundreds of British ships that sank in 1833 (“an average of six every week of the year”), Andrew C. A. Jampoler notes that “[i]n every other year literally hundreds of British ships sank and hundreds on board them drowned.”¹¹ In the words of George P. Landow, shipwreck was “an ever-present threat to sailors of all nations … sea disasters occurred frequently enough during the past two centuries that many artistic and literary figures not only could have encountered them in newspaper accounts and other published shipwreck narratives but also could have been acquainted with them more intimately.”¹² Newspapers printed “lengthy and melodramatic accounts” of shipwreck; these sensational stories were balanced by more factual and statistical records published by the Board of Trade in *Casualty Returns*.¹³ Shipwreck figures into many literary and visual works from the period.¹⁴ Many other historians emphasize the “commonplace” nature of shipwreck in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ (The image of some wrecks even appeared “emblazoned” on domestic items like plates and tea trays.¹⁶) However, although shipwreck was extremely common in the nineteenth century, we must not assume that the two shipwrecks in *Villette* are simply historical flavor, a backdrop against which the narrative plays out. On the contrary, the shipwrecks are crucial episodes that signal the novel’s acute political and historical awareness. I begin with the first shipwreck, which suggests a specific figuration of maritime trauma: the slave ship.

At the narrative helm of *Villette* is Lucy Snowe, who deploys a metaphor of nautical desolation to adumbrate a past trauma that shapes her identity. She invokes not only the tropes of rough sailing and storms at sea but also the imagery of jettison, being cast overboard by forces beyond your control. Describing her journey from childhood to maturity, Lucy asks the reader initially to “picture [her] … as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as
glass” (p. 35). This seems like smooth sailing, but the line echoes the fateful voyage in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798): “the harbour-bay was clear as glass.” Indeed, in the very next paragraph the “halcyon weather” turns into a “heavy tempest”:

> However, it cannot be concealed that … I must have somehow fallen over-board, or that there must have been wreck at last … To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness [*sic*] of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs … [T]here was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.

The opening invocation of Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* suggests that there is a deeper moral conflict here, a psychological burden that hangs around Lucy’s neck like the albatross. In one form or another, pain builds up and surfaces: in Lucy’s words, “there must have been wreck at last.” In this section I consider the history of slavery and racial trauma that informs Lucy’s wreck.

In a novel so concerned about religious faith, we should not be surprised that the language here echoes the shipwreck of another Paul—Saint Paul the Apostle. Compare the penultimate lines of Lucy’s narration with the account of St. Paul’s wreck off the coast of Malta from Acts 27:19–20. Lucy writes, “For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away.” St. Paul writes, “we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. / And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” Lucy’s narration redeployes some of the same language as St. Paul’s shipwreck. While other scholars do note this Biblical allusion, no critic to my knowledge explores the significance of the Lucy’s connection to this apostle.
importance, I believe, is twofold: in rewriting St. Paul’s wreck, Lucy invokes issues of missionary work and slavery. By doing so, she troubles the idea of progress as well as the historical awareness of the post-emancipation reader.

The Biblical allusions in the first shipwreck passage link Lucy with St. Paul, a foundational Christian missionary who undertook three journeys during his lifetime. I see Lucy as a kind of missionary herself: although she does not explicitly proselytize, she travels into a foreign land with a predominant religion that differs from her own, and she critiques the shortcomings and faults of that faith. Yet the missionary in the nineteenth century was a liminal figure, a stranger in a strange land caught between worlds. As explained by Catherine Hall, English missionaries to the West Indies occupied a highly ambivalent position. They were white, yet allies of the slaves and freed blacks; at the same time, these white Englishmen stood apart from both the white plantation owners and the other Englishmen back home. Hall draws out the contradictions of the white, middle-class, “Englishness” of the missionaries, for it had to be simultaneously superior yet humble, incomparable yet achievable, patriarchal yet brotherly, and independent yet dependent. Such ambivalence characterized the very goal of West Indian missionary work. As explained by Sue Thomas, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century missionary societies taught their missionaries “to address the spiritual and not the civil or temporal condition of the enslaved.” By the “temporal condition of the enslaved,” Thomas refers to the current status of the slaves under the laws of a specific nation at a specific time—as opposed to their “spiritual condition,” which derives from their adherence to the universal laws of the Christian God. Missionary work would save the slave’s soul but not their body.

Missionary societies feared that to counteract “temporal” laws was to incite revolution. This returns us to Paul the Apostle, for missionary societies took as a precedent “the apostles of
Jesus who proselytized among the enslaved people in the Roman empire and did not advocate slave rebellion.” In a four-part article series entitled “The West Indian Controversy” from *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*—a periodical to which the Brontë family subscribed—John Gibson Lockhart uses the example of Paul the Apostle to argue that slavery cannot be eradicated in one fell swoop; abolition must be a slow, generations-long process without rebellion:

> [Paul] throughout all his writings preaches to the slaves, as individuals, the duty of reverence and submission toward their masters, and that he never in any one instance breathes even a hint as to the emancipation of them *as a class*, or as to the possibility of slavery being exterminated, *as a condition of human life*,—these facts are equally conclusive evidence that this great apostle conceived it unwise, if not impossible, to get rid of the slavery then existing in the world by any means of a sudden or violent nature—in other words, that he … foresaw that the best, if not the only means of abolishing it, consisted in the promotion of the virtue and industry of the slaves themselves … he avoided doing or saying anything that might tend to irritate the slaves against their masters, and make them consider their condition as one of absolute illegality and oppression.25

This *Blackwood’s* excerpt suggests that to invoke Paul to Apostle was also to invoke a specific debate around and understanding of West Indian slavery. Through the example of Paul the Apostle’s teachings, Lockhart outlines a paradox: the only way out of slavery is continued slavery. Slaves must be obedient to their masters and labor in order to be saved; “virtue” and “industry” must come before freedom. Paul, the article proclaims, realized that slavery is an ineffaceable “*condition of human life*”: although an individual slave may be freed without consequences, to free the entire “*class*” of slaves by means of a “sudden or violent nature”—such as universal emancipation or slave rebellion—would only create more problems than it would solve. Paradoxically, the solution to slavery is the continued “duty of reverence and submission toward their masters,” which would teach slaves the values and disciplines requisite for a life of freedom. Lockhart later quotes Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 5: “*Slaves, be
obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, even as unto Christ.”

This paradoxical sentiment is echoed in several other periodicals of the period. In “The West India Question” from Blackwood’s, the author describes a slave rebellion in Cape Town, where the slaves rose to freedom too quickly. Again, the solution is prolonged servitude: to save black men, women, and children from “the most frightful vices” and racial “extermination,” England “must admit them, by slow degrees, and imperceptible gradations, to the advantages and the destitution of freedom.” The article’s emphasis on “slow degrees” and “imperceptible gradations” raises further questions about progress with regard to abolition. Freedom drifts further and further away on the horizon as the structures of slavery persevere. Authors justified such stasis with the fear that slaves were being emancipated into something worse—specifically, the capitalist marketplace. Thomas Carlyle, in his polemical “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question” (1849)—first published in Fraser’s Magazine, another periodical to which the Brontë family subscribed—attacks the ideals and effects of the abolitionist movement. The essay indelicately muses on how to respond to the titular “Negro Question,” how to deal with the recently emancipated blacks of the West Indies. It lays out a racial hierarchy of “wise” whites ruling over “foolish” blacks and blatantly proposes to reinstate former slaves into a system of prolonged “servitude.” Carlyle founds his anti-anti-slavery thesis upon the decay that supply-and-demand thinking has wrought upon Britain and the rest of the civilized, western world. The essay argues that the combination of emancipation and economics—the “unhappy wedlock of Philanthropic Liberalism and the Dismal Science”—has corrupted the lands and peoples of the West Indies and, by extension, Great Britain itself. Carlyle calls for a return to a kind of feudal serfdom (an “Adscripti glebæ,” service tied to the soil), wherein contracts could not be so easily
revoked.\textsuperscript{30} This solution would provide a “contract of long continuance,” the much needed structure that will serve mankind best in the long run.\textsuperscript{31} Although Carlyle’s diatribe appears far more antagonistic than Paul the Apostle’s preaching, the two share a fundamental idea: the structures of slavery can, must, and will persist.

With this historical context in consideration, I return to Lucy’s shipwreck. The passage (quoted in full above) invokes issues of slavery beyond the explicit allusions to Paul the Apostle, for the imagery evokes the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Lucy’s shipwreck oscillates between general metaphor and specific historical representation. Specifically, I see within Lucy’s narration traces of the jettison of slaves and the wreck of slave ships. I begin with the \textit{Zong} incident of 1781, for, as Ian Baucom argues, the \textit{Zong} case became a representational touchstone: any instance of slaves thrown overboard or drowning at sea was thought of in terms of the \textit{Zong}.\textsuperscript{32} Faced with a shortage of water, the crew of the \textit{Zong} threw overboard one hundred and thirty to one hundred and forty slaves. Lucy undergoes a similar trauma in the cold waters of Atlantic, suffering a “nightmare” of the “rush and saltness of briny waves in [her] throat, and their icy pressure on [her] lungs” (p. 35). In terms of the novel, one could easily argue that the jettison here foreshadows Lucy’s “slavery” under Madame Beck and M. Paul Emmanuel. There are eleven instances of “slave” in \textit{Villette}, most of which appear in descriptions of the disciplinary discourses of the boarding school. Lucy, for instance, notes that “great pains were taken to hide chains with flowers” at the school; “Each mind was being reared in slavery” (p. 127). In this example, the trauma comes from within the novel. But what about pain that comes from without? The slavery metaphor becomes more complicated when we look outwards toward history rather than inwards toward plot.
At the beginning of the shipwreck passage, Lucy writes that “I must have somehow fallen over-board” (p. 35). Her tone is uncertain, as if she has forgotten how she ended up “over-board.” The use of “somehow” here signals a gap, a lacuna in Lucy’s memory. Among the handful of literary critics who treat the two shipwrecks in *Villette*, several take a psychoanalytic tack, attempting to elucidate the lack that forms Lucy’s identity. David Sandner argues that Lucy exists in an “unheimlich state.” From a structural standpoint, the first shipwreck takes the place of Lucy’s family in the narrative. Instead of a description of her home life—her “return to the bosom of [her] kindred”—we have the shipwreck passage (p. 35). Hence Lucy, Sandner suggests, remains “as one shipwrecked, alone and adrift, in her life,” oscillating between loss and home, self and other. Along the same lines, Heather Glen reads the shipwreck as an uncanny return: the past reappears before Lucy as “an unbidden spectacle, and its reappearance leads merely to repetition and pain.” While Sandner’s and Glen’s claims are illuminating, they ultimately treat Lucy’s trauma as an individual experience. I, however, feel that Lucy’s pain reverberates on a larger scale, on the level of history itself. After all, Lucy herself cries out, “I see a huge mass of my fellow-creatures in no better circumstances. I see that a great many men, and more women, hold their span of life on conditions of denial and privation” (p. 361). I will discuss the gendered implications of Lucy’s claim below; for now, I want to consider how trauma bleeds across both personal and narrative boundaries. Here I build upon the work of trauma studies scholars such as Ann E. Kaplan, who stresses that “[a]lthough cultural traumas are not ‘remembered in the usual sense because of the specificity of the trauma … the impact of past crimes in a nation-state may evidence itself in the form of cultural ‘symptoms.’” If we take history as the open secret of *Villette*, then we can connect private and public narratives as well as individual and collective traumas.
The explicit and implicit invocations of slavery and shipwreck in *Villette* illuminate how pain transgresses both personal and narrative boundaries. In Lucy’s own words, “it cannot be concealed” (p. 35). The absent presence of jettison in her shipwreck indicates the complex temporal and spatial dimensions of trauma. Although trauma remains difficult to represent, it can reach across time and space to shape (consciously or otherwise) various identities. A notorious, violent, and/or horrific event can seep across different temporal and spatial dimensions. In the case of jettison, the violence of Britain’s past bled into its present. John McCoubrey notes that the jettison of slaves occupied the center of a “public and highly controversial argument” about abolition.37 Even after the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and slavery itself in 1833, critics implicated Britain in the ongoing death of black men, women, and children at sea. The West Africa Squadron of the Royal Navy patrolled the coast to pursue and capture extant slavers. (Several countries—including Spain and Portugal—continued through the 1830s and 1840s.) Although this seems like a philanthropic gesture, the British captains were impelled by an economic motive. Britain awarded captains prize money for the capture of slave ships—but only slave ships captures on the open ocean. Hence many captains allowed slavers to leave the coast before pursuit, and, when the chase was underway, the slavers would jettison slaves to lighten the load.38 As such, many critics argued that the Royal Navy—and, by extension, Britain itself—was complicit in the continued violence toward black people. In the 1839 preface to his *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* (originally published in 1808), the English abolitionist Thomas Clarkson decries the role of the Royal Navy in the death of slaves by jettison. He notes that of the 100,000 slaves annually transported to Cuba and Brazil, “as many perish by a miserable death in escaping from the cruisers as reach their destination.”39
Trauma also can bleed across different levels of representation, in terms of both perspective and medium. Recall Kaplan’s claim that a nation’s past crimes may appear obliquely “in the form of cultural ‘symptoms.’” Taking literature as one such cultural “symptom” frames *Villette* as a vessel for the wounds in and of Britain’s past—including the pain of the victims as well as the crimes of the perpetrators. Note that Lucy occupies the position of both the slave and the slaver in the shipwreck passage. After flailing in the cold water, she suddenly reappears on the deck of the ill-fated ship. No longer struggling against the “briny waves,” she now must ride out the “heavy tempest” (p. 35). Lucy is not an evil or malicious character, yet here, I argue, she occupies the position of the slaver. This is an example of what Joseph Roach calls the “circum-Atlantic world,” a historical mode that “insist[s] on the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of African and the Americas.” Circum-Atlantic memory retains the consequences of the “unspeakable violence” that was instrumental to the creation of modernity. Like Kaplan’s theory of traumatic “symptoms,” Roach’s concept of the circum-Atlantic memory demonstrates that “the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible.” The horrors of the past can appear in even the most unassuming of forms. Furthermore, the “heavy tempest” which threatens the life of Lucy-the-slaver recalls a trope in abolitionist literature and art that depicts slavers caught up in a deadly storm, a form of divine retribution for their sins. Several literary critics and art historians draw attention to the range of works that featured slave ships wrecked (or on the cusp of being wrecked) by storms. McCoubrey cites “Summer” (from *The Seasons*) by James Thomson (1727); “The Negro’s Complaint” by William Cowper (1792); *The Dying Negro, A Poem* by Thomas Day (1775); “Song on the Wreck of a Slave Ship” by a “Marius” (1806); *Abolition of the African Slave Trade* by James Montgomery (1814); “The Slave Ship” in *The New Monthly Magazine* (1831); and other works of poetry and prose that feature the slave ships
racked and wrecked by storms as a metaphor for the end of the slave trade. In most of these accounts, the storm is figured as a manifestation of divine judgment, an instance of the Christian God abolishing the unnatural practice of slavery in one fell swoop. Relevant visual works include *The Negro Revenged* by Henry Fuseli (1806–07); *The Raft of the ‘Medusa’* by Théodore Géricault (1819); and *The Deluge* (c. 1805) and *The Slave Ship* (1840) by Turner, among others. (I will dive into a deeper description of Turner’s *Slave Ship* below.) All of these works, as well as the telling perspective shift in Lucy’s shipwreck narrative, serve as symptoms of a violent past that “cannot be concealed” or repressed (p. 35). A history of circum-Atlantic trauma floods *Villette* and its network of associated works with significance.

Yet despite the proliferation of these symptoms, reading or understanding past trauma is not easy—perhaps not even possible. If the shipwreck scene is a return of the repressed, then it is an incomplete return. If, like Roach, *Villette* insists upon the centrality of genocidal history, then that central node remains hidden. Despite jettison being such a publicized affair and the wreckage of slave ships being such a popular abolitionist metaphor, Lucy only refers obliquely to the history of slavery that, I argue, informs her writing. Again we see history as the open secret: in both senses of the word, slavery is secreted by *Villette*. Although we can intuit its presence, the history in, of, and behind *Villette* remains just beyond the horizon of representation. Lucy’s shipwreck narrative is filled with gaps and displacements. The forgetful “somehow” of her story can only hint at the history of jettison. The gap in Lucy’s memory—the “somehow” in her private narrative—speaks to a formative absence. This lacuna, I believe, is symptomatic of the breakdown of memory and history in the face of trauma. The “somehow” enacts a repetition and transformation of the past that recalls the *fort / da* game described by Sigmund Freud. In the second chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud uses the story of a young child
playing with a reel and string to theorize the compulsion to repeat as a response to trauma. As the child tosses the reel away, he shouts “fort!” (“gone!”); when he pulls it back, he shouts “da!” (“there!”). Freud posits that the child uses the fort / da game as a form of compensation, a reenactment to transform an unpleasant departure (either of the reel or his mother) into the anticipation of a pleasant return. In this traditional understanding of repetition compulsion, Lucy’s narration is a form of recovery. Following Freud’s conclusion that the compulsion to repeat represents the desire “to conjure up what has been forgotten and repressed,” Lucy’s narrative serves as a means to dredge up a sunken past, to pull the horrors of jettison into the light of history. This hypothesis, however, fails to account for the “somehow” in Lucy’s narrative, the loss that cannot be retrieved from the deep. I thus turn to Cathy Caruth, who argues against Freud’s thesis, asserting that the fort / da game does not produce pleasure but rather effaces memory. The original event “recedes from awareness even as it reemerges in the game.” Put simply, the child’s reenactment of the disappearance of his mother effectively removes from his consciousness the actual disappearance of his mother. Bringing this to bear upon Villette, Lucy’s very attempt to speak of the past renders the past inaccessible. If this history, as Lucy writes, “cannot be concealed,” it also cannot be fully expressed. Traumatic history must remain an open secret, the absent-yet-present “somehow” that always already informs our speech yet always already remains unspoken.

History thus functions as a form of erasure. Indeed, Caruth contends that “history emerges … as the performance of its own disappearance.” The process of disappearance-through-representation recalls Jacques Derrida’s hypothesis in Archive Fever that any act of preservation initiates destruction. Derrida draws upon Freud’s idea of the “death drive,” noting how our fear of loss impels us to save but also allows us to forget. The archive thus works
against itself: archiving something effectively consigns it to oblivion. Anything surrendered to the archive will appear only as the “spectral” traces of iteration.\textsuperscript{49} History itself is an archive, for it allows us to forget—and forgetting is never innocent, never without repercussions.\textsuperscript{50} As both Kaplan and Roach suggest, the past will inevitably rise up to the surface, but Derrida’s theory states that whatever surfaces might be unrecognizable. Roach himself admits that the “most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred.”\textsuperscript{51} Consider the second half of the shipwreck passage. When Lucy speaks from the perspective of the slaver, her casting overboard of seaborne property might be read as a form of displacement or transference. Lucy is compelled to repeat a traumatic past, but that repetition appears in disguise. She writes, “we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship” (p. 35). I would like to suggest that the “tackling” here is a surrogate for the jettisoned slaves. Like a slaver pursued by the West Africa Squadron, Lucy attempts to lighten the load. Her Biblical forebear, Paul the Apostle, makes an additional reference to throwing property overboard: “And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship.”\textsuperscript{52} Recall that until the Zong court decision in 1783, slaves were treated as inanimate cargo rather than human beings.\textsuperscript{53} It might not be unreasonable, then, to read the jettison of the tackling as a “forgetful” jettison of captive slaves. This is Roach’s “memory imperfectly deferred.” We must be skeptical, then, of Lucy’s opening disclosure, “it cannot be concealed,” which seems to protest too much. What, exactly, “cannot be concealed?” What hides beneath that pronoun, “it?” If Villette is a history, if Villette is an archive, then any traces of the past it contains will inevitably be transformed, flawed in their representation.

The gaps and displacements in Lucy’s memory signal what Leo Costello dubs the “limits of representation,” a mode of composition through decomposition wherein the unspeakable is rendered incomplete, and no complex unity can be (re)assembled from this representative
“dissolution.” Costello’s astute analysis of the limits of representation in two of Turner’s paintings of shipwreck and maritime trauma—*Disaster at Sea* (c. 1835) and *The Slave Ship*—provides a productive catalyst for understanding the shipwrecks Brontë’s *Villette*. I begin with Turner’s *Disaster at Sea* [Figure 1, below], a painting based upon the wreck of the *Amphitrite*, an English ship that ran aground off the French coast near Boulogne in 1833. Bound for Australia, the *Amphitrite* carried one hundred and eight female convicts and twelve children. All were lost in the wreck. News coverage of the event sparked popular outrage, for all of the passengers might have been saved. As Andrew C. A. Jampoler puts it, the *Amphitrite*’s “agony played out in public” on a large scale. Cecelia Powell likewise notes that the wreck occupied “more column inches in *The Times* than any other” shipwreck. As to Turner’s painting, his visuals are undeniably violent. The swirling clouds and churning sea come together in a mass of grey, blue, white, and brown, dwarfing and devouring the fragments of the ship and its passengers. A mass of limbs cling for life on the shreds of a raft; the bodies of the women and children lie tangled together. The framing places the viewer directly on the edge of the tragedy, powerless to do anything but observe. Powell argues that it serves as a similar “outcry against ‘man’s inhumanity to man’ or, to be more precise … ‘man’s inhumanity to woman.’” Costello’s analysis, however, questions the essence of this “outcry.” Focusing on the face—“which is almost not a face”—of the central figure, Costello argues that “something more, or less as it were” is at work here. The central woman drifts along in a state of dissolution, as if “Turner’s nerve failed in the face of the unspeakable.” *Disaster at Sea* reaches the limit of representation, a state of abjection where the bodies retain a degree historical specificity (the wreck of the *Amphitrite*) but at the same time resist being fully detailed, fully spoken for. A similar effect, I believe, occurs in *Villette*. Lucy’s shipwreck retains the traces of the history of slavery and the slave trade, but her
narration features gaps—akin to the abject, faceless face of the central female figure in Turner’s *Disaster at Sea*—that resist representation.

An even closer parallel to Brontë’s *Villette* is Turner’s *The Slave Ship, Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhon [sic] Coming On* [Figure 2, below]. As the full title of the work suggests, the painting deals with slavery and the slave trade, specifically the horrors of jettison and the abolitionist trope of the oncoming storm. In the background, a tall ship crashes into the high waves of a cold, blue-grey sea. The vessel, silhouetted against a fiery sunset, heads into a dark mass of clouds. The foreground depicts parts of the body of jettisoned slave: a black leg and torso sink—or perhaps float—surrounded by a frenzied horde of apparently hungry fish. To the left of the piecemeal body, dark chains hang suspended, seemingly frozen in time, cutting through the plane of the water. Again, the directionality remains uncertain: do the chains fall downwards or do they ascend from the deep? In fact, the longer you stare at the ocean here, the more rises up from it. Alongside the various gulls and sea creatures, a small sea of disembodied hands emerges from the waves. The temporality of the painting thus seems to contradict itself: in the foreground, the sea literally heaves up the past; in the background, the sea carries the slaver to its future demise. Adding to this complexity is the title, which is in the continuous present tense. Along the same lines, critics debate the historical referent of Turner’s work. Albert Biome, for example, reads the painting as a representation of the 1781 *Zong* incident; McCoubrey, by contrast, argues that the painting does not represent the *Zong* massacre but rather the enduring problems of the slave trade (by Spain and Portugal) and jettison (exacerbated by the Royal Navy) in the mid-nineteenth century. Costello, however, suggests that we should see Turner’s *Slave Ship* as a reference to both, a “diachronic pictorial space.” Such a proposal accounts for the painting’s seemingly contradictory sense of time (recall the floating and/or sinking body, chains,
Simultaneity serves as a means of critique, “call[ing] into question the linear progression of historical time.” Costello calls this “dialectical history painting,” a mode of visual representation that oscillates between past and present, between back- and foreground, and between metaphor and singularity. A similar dialectic oscillation can be felt in *Villette*, for Lucy’s shipwreck narrative moves between past and present with a telos highly skeptical of the linear progression of historical time. Trauma is synchronic, not diachronic. The violence of the past surges upward to the present. Horror cannot be fully consigned to the deep. In terms of *The Slave Ship*, Costello notes that Turner refuses to offer the “release” of slavery being eradicated in a single symbolic, apocalyptic moment. Instead, Turner emphasizes the persistence of the evils of the slave trade: there is no “final point of release.” Like Paul the Apostle, Carlyle, and Turner before her, Lucy sees the *longue durée* of slavery. Consciously or otherwise, its structures will endure; its effects will reach through history.

I reiterate, however, that a literary or visual representation can never fully manifest the past, especially a traumatic past. In the case of *The Slave Ship* and *Villette*, Turner and Brontë (respectively) reach the limits of representation. These limits appear in their treatment of female figures. Costello posits that the foreground figure in *The Slave Ship* is a woman. He bases this innovative claim on the two shadowy breasts that appear beneath the leg (along the lower border of the painting) as well as Turner’s representation of women in *Disaster at Sea*. This woman embodies the limits of representation, for Turner cuts off her head and, by extension, her identity with the edge of the canvas. According to Costello, this loss of identity symbolizes the physical, mental, and sexual violence endured by black female slaves—evils that “would not ever be treated as crimes because of the black woman’s objectified status as property.” Moreover, the piecemeal, faceless body manifests the violation that occurs when history, visual art, and
literature transform a specific trauma into a metaphorical type. Historical representation (re)enacts a form of violence through erasure. The *Zong* case, for example, transformed the deaths of individual slaves into a faceless metaphor for the horrors of jettison, the brutality of empire, and/or the corruption of the capitalist “cash nexus.” Turner attempts to resist this violation through the limits of representation: the woman drifts between metaphor and singularity, unable to be appropriated by either discourse. He calls attention to women caught in the wreckage of so many exchanges—racial, imperial, martial, capitalist, etc. This recalls the gendered imbalance in Lucy’s observation from above, “I see that a great many men, and more women, hold their span of life on conditions of denial and privation” (p. 361). The “denial and privation” here may be material (food, clothing, shelter, money, etc.) but it may also be historical in the most literal sense—that is, more than a “great many” of women are denied a place within history. They exist simultaneously within and without, inside and outside of a hegemonic patriarchal history, a kind of “double consciousness” that shares common ground with Paul Gilroy’s discussion of what it means to be both European and black. Lucy suggests something similar with the first shipwreck of *Villette*. She reaches the limits of representation: memory fails, and she must rely upon a man’s words (those of Paul the Apostle) to tell the story. The violence and violation here—of black people, but also perhaps of the women caught in the wake of British patriarchal history—oscillates between allusion and singularity.

In sum, Costello’s reading of Turner helps us see *Villette* not only as a form of dialectical history writing, but also as a history awash with the limits of representation. His project—which, as I hope is evident, I have found tremendously helpful—provides the framework through which we can understand Lucy’s position as both historian and historical subject. Like Turner, Lucy is both the victim and agent of history. (I will have more to say about the fictional or non-fictional
status of each figure below.) Costello’s project is as much about Turner as it is about Turner’s work. Costello proposes that Turner is a twofold subject of history: a figure subject to contemporary social and political forces, as well as an agent sculpting history as an academic, disciplinary subject. I am reminded here of LaCapra’s claim that trauma must be seen as “raising the question of identity” rather than simply “founding an identity.” Lucy’s identity is constantly in flux, a negotiation between her power as narrator and the trauma of the past. The gaps and displacements in Lucy’s memory symbolize her simultaneously coming to terms with and attempting to forget the traumatic history of her world. Her narration serves as both catharsis and reenactment. **Villette** can be seen as a form of narrative medicine, the fragmented product of a repetition compulsion seeking to understand a past that cannot be understood. The success of such cathartic narration, however, remains uncertain, for **Villette** also reenacts the trauma and loss of life, history, and memory. Like *The Slave Ship*, **Villette** is an admission of guilt that “repeats the crime itself.” As a result, the novel manifests the transformative effects of loss. To borrow an apropos metaphor from Judith Butler, “I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen.” Such unplanned “waves” may come from the past or the present, (de)constructing the subject position of the writer and (re)shaping her process of representation.

Indeed, Lucy’s flawed memory suggests not only that trauma cannot be accurately remembered or represented, but also that she is subject to forces beyond her control. On the one hand, Lucy suffers the aftershocks of a larger cultural trauma. Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco write that massive upheaval “may even traumatize those members of a community, society, or social group who were absent when the catastrophe or persecution took place.” Kaplan likewise notes that “traumatic events may affect the discourse of an entire
nation’s public narratives.” Although some critics argue against a theory of trauma that forges a collective identity, others claim that trauma creates affinity. Besides exceptional experiences of trauma, Lucy has to negotiate the everyday discourses of nineteenth-century western Europe. Glen notes that many men and women in nineteenth-century England were “victims of forces over which they had little control.” Rather fittingly, she references a lecture by a Reverend John Cummings, “The Age We Live In” (1848), which equates being overwhelmed by contemporary circumstances with shipwreck: “The sea of prosperity ebbed, and forthwith the proud vessels, that set sail with such magnificent promise, were left utter wrecks, high and dry, upon the strand.” Lucy (and, by extension, Brontë herself) is embedded within history: her very subjectivity is shaped by the forces and ideologies—nationalism, imperialism, racism, sexism, capitalism, etc.—that constitute “the nineteenth century.”

From a certain perspective, I too am one of the forces beyond Lucy’s control. I wield a kind of power over her: as a literary critic and historicist, I make the decision on how to construct (and then deconstruct) Lucy’s world. In this project, it is my hand that shapes the forces of nationalism, imperialism, racism, sexism, capitalism, et al. that in turn shape Lucy. This is because any archive functions as a site of institutionalized power. As explained by Derrida, the structure of the archive determines what kinds of narratives and histories are possible—that is, what kinds of narratives and histories can be written. If *Villette* is a history, if *Villette* is an archive, then, in one sense, it is a history and/or an archive of my making. Such a claim seems to reenact a kind of trauma, reinscribing Lucy as a victim of forces beyond her control. Perhaps—but it also reveals the double bind of the deconstructive literary historian: I know that there is a history in, of, and behind *Villette*, but I can never fully access it. This again raises the question of the relationship between individual and collective trauma. Dominick LaCapra insists that
“historical trauma is specific, and not everyone is subject to it or entitled to a subject position associated with it.”

Where, then, does the historian stand in relation to their traumatic object of study? Critics have much to say about the spatial dimensions of trauma but less to say about the temporal dimensions of trauma beyond its original era. How fully can the critic, separated by place and time, understand the violence of the past? Is it possible to theorize or construct a longue durée of trauma? In this age of poststructuralist thought, I am inclined to answer no. Even more so than the author (who, as Roland Barthes explains, is dead) and the origin (which, Michel Foucault proclaims, is irrecoverable), the historian cannot truly open a dialogue with historical trauma.

Indeed, historical trauma is doubly distanced from the historian, separated by mystifying effects of time and by the specificity (as noted by Capra) of trauma itself. We thus can come full circle, for, from a certain perspective, Lucy is also beyond my control. The very process of interpreting trauma consigns Lucy’s history—of the nineteenth century, of shipwreck, of slavery—to the realm of the open secret, something indicated yet concealed. To repurpose a phrase from Miller, my “battle” to understand the secret of trauma “has already been lost in the preparations for it.”

History, then, does not so much efface trauma as it does render trauma an open secret. To be erased and to be secret are not one and the same, for an open secret is always already secreted. We arrive at a paradox: the history of trauma is not lost but not recoverable.

SHIPWRECK II: VILLETTE AND THE SHIP OF STATE

Shifting my gaze from first shipwreck in Villette to the second, I want to consider the complexity of M. Paul Emmanuel’s supposed shipwreck at the end of the novel. In a violent scene of shipwreck, a week-long storm rages on until “the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks” (p. 495). The fate of Paul, sailing back from the West Indies, remains ambiguous. My concern is not so much whether or not Paul lives or dies but rather how, through the motif of shipwreck, to
understand the intersections between his racial status, national identity, and historical context. I contend that the second shipwreck echoes not literal but metaphorical wreckage. Unlike the first shipwreck, which traces the literal loss of life in the slave trade, the second shipwreck invokes the idea of the foundering “ship of state,” a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century metaphor for political, social, and economic upheaval. Once again, we see the acute historical and political awareness of Villette. I argue that the second shipwreck, full of destruction and ambiguity, echoes the uncertainty that weighs on Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The “ship of state” metaphor has a long, wide history. It appears as far back as Plato. In the Socratic dialogue Statesman (c. 369–47 BCE), Plato writes, “We see many instances of cities going down like sinking ships to their destruction. There have been such wrecks in the past and surely there will be others in the future, caused by the wickedness of captains and crews alike. For these are guilty men, whose sin is supreme ignorance of what matters most.” A similar figuration of the city-as-ship appears in Plato’s Laws: “just as a ship at sea must have a perpetual watch set, day and night, so also a state, tossed, as it is, on the billows of interstate affairs and in peril of being trapped by plots of every sort.” In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, authors deployed the ship of state metaphor to signal political, social, and economic upheaval. Boyd Hilton traces how shipwreck stands in for bankruptcy in a range of bourgeois texts. He also alludes to shipwreck’s ties to morality, citing Robert Peel, 2nd Baronet, who draws an analogy between “the fluctuations of the waves caused by physical forces, and the fluctuations of society caused by moral ones.” George P. Landow provides a further catalogue of the ship of state metaphor in Images of Crisis (1982), which examines instances of social and political shipwreck in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. He cites Victor Hugo’s poem “Au Peuple” (1853—the same year of publication as Villette), which compares the common masses to a huge
Moreover, Landow draws attention to Carlyle’s figuration of political upheaval as shipwreck in *The French Revolution* (1837). Carlyle exclaims, “And how your National Assembly, like a ship water-logged, helmless, lies tumbling … and waits where the waves of chance may please to strand it; suspicious, nay on the Left-side, conscious, what submarine Explosion is meanwhile a-charging!” He continues, observing how “Catholicism, Classicism, Sentimentalism, Cannibalism: all *isms* that make up Man in France, are rushing and roaring in that gulf”—that “gulf” being the Reign of Terror, with a stormy pun on “rain.” Most importantly, though, the metaphorical ship of state appears all over the globe, a transnational omen of unrest. Nineteenth-century periodicals utilize the trope for a variety of locales. On Britain: *Fraser’s Magazine* proposes that the decline and fall of other great cities must serve as warnings to the British government; “thus should the Ship of State be seen sailing over the waters of time gone by: there is always a burning wake in her track, indicating her course and her perils.” On France: discussing the Bourbons and the Charter of 1814, a *Quarterly Review* author writes that “to go on with the charter of Louis XVIII., as it stood was inevitably to shipwreck the vessel of state.” On the United States of America: in an article on the controversial, recently passed Fugitive Slave Law, *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* observes that “[t]he Thirty-First Congress has adjourned. The leaf which it furnishes in the history of the country will be memorable. It has been the occasion upon which the good ship of state has encountered one of those inevitable storms that try the soundness of her timbers, the strength of her rigging, and the courage and address of the crew.” And on the West Indies: *Fraser’s Magazine* laments that the Whig’s policies in 1849 threaten to “make shipwreck” of their sugar-producing colonies. And *Blackwood’s* reprints an article from *The Jamaican Courant* addressing the coming governmental changes: “the representatives of an
oppressed and deeply injured people have met in council, to deliberate on the civil and political economy; and like pilots in a storm, to consult on the means most advisable to conduct the tempest-tost bark through the billows of an agitated ocean.”

With this historical context in mind, we can see the turbulent conclusion of *Villette* not only as a literal shipwreck but also as a metaphor for political upheaval—not just in Britain, not just in Europe, but across the globe in the West Indies as well. Awaiting Paul’s return at the end of the novel, Lucy writes of the terrifying storm and ensuing wreck. I reproduce it in full:

[H]e is coming … The skies hang full and dark—a rack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange forms—arches and broad radiations; there rise resplendent mornings—glorious, royal, purple as monarch in his state; the heavens are one flame; so wild are they, they rival battle at its thickest—so bloody, they shame Victory in her pride. I know some signs of the sky; I have noted them ever since childhood. God, watch that sail! Oh! guard it!

The wind shifts to the west. Peace, peace, Banshee—“keening” at every window! It will rise—it will swell—it shrieks out long: wander as I may though the house this night, I cannot lull the blast. The advancing hours make it strong: by midnight, all sleepless watchers hear and fear a wild south-west storm.

That storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder—the tremor of whose plumes was storm.

Peace, be still! Oh! a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered—not uttered till, when the hush came, some could not feel it: till, when the sun returned, his light was night to some! (p. 495).

Reading this powerful passage as an account of the wreck of the ship of state, several historical and political references rise to the surface. The *HMS Victory*, Lord Nelson’s flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar, appears by name. The allusion is certainly appropriate for the “wild” skies that “rival battle at its thickest.” For at Trafalgar Nelson broke with the traditional line of battle, wherein opposing fleets would face off in two parallel lines in order to maximize the damage from a broadside barrage. Instead, Nelson charged the combined French and Spanish fleet with
two ship columns arranged perpendicularly, throwing the sea into chaos. (See, for example, the
crisscrossed masts, lines, and sails in Turner’s *The Battle of Trafalgar, as Seen from the
Starboard Mizzen Shrouds of the Victory* [1806–08].) On a biographical note, when Brontë
visited London in the summer of 1851, she recorded her “admiration for Trafalgar Square, with
its monument celebrating Nelson’s victory over the combined French and Spanish fleet.”

The “rack sail[ing] from the west” and the “wind shift[ing] to the west” symbolize the
growing unrest in the West Indies. Unlike the abolitionist discourse of the first shipwreck, in
which storms signal divine justice wiping out slavery, here the storm suggests social and political
unrest. Hannah Arendt explains how a new metaphorical vocabulary arose from the French
Revolution, and storm imagery became a textual touchstone for discussions of political
upheaval. In terms of the West Indies, Thomas notes that in *Blackwood’s*, a periodical “read
avidly by the Brontë children,” slave rebellion is “figured as an ‘approach[ing] storm.” She
also draws attention to the meteorological omens in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*: Edward Rochester
describes the enslaved as “black clouds”; on his journey to England from the West Indies, he
remarks that “the storm broke, streamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure.”

In addition to the growing racial tension, the West Indies suffered economic uncertainty. The Sugar
Duties Act of 1846 raised the import fees for sugar from the British colonies. The loss of both
cheap slave labor and preferential tariff protection meant that plantation owners in the West
Indies could not compete with the sugar plantations in Cuba and Brazil, which still used slave
labor. Destruction was on the horizon: *Blackwood’s* notes that the “government of the West India
colonies, embracing so many wealthy and important islands, consuming L.12,000,000 worth of
British manufactures, containing L.130,000,000 of British capital, employing 250,000 tons of
British shipping, is silently slipping from our hands.”¹⁰¹ We must not forget that the concluding shipwreck of *Villette* occurs on Paul’s attempted return from the West Indies.

The “Banshee … ‘keening’ at every window” and the “thousand weepers, praying in agony” might once again suggest the victimhood of women. Like the faceless women of *Disaster at Sea* and *The Slave Ship*, these women must bear the burden and losses of empire. The passage recalls Powell’s description of Turner’s *The Field of Waterloo* (1818), with its foreground “composed of women searching among the corpses for their loved ones.” She explains that “Britain has won a great victory. Napoleon has been vanquished, Europe is now free from his lust for power. But as night falls over the battlefield, so too have darkness and uncertainty descended on these women and the children in their arms.”¹⁰² The wailing voices may mourn the death and destruction of the years 1848–49, a turbulent time for both Brontë and Europe.

Branwell Brontë dies 24 September 1849; Emily Brontë dies 19 December 1848; and Anne Brontë dies at the end of 28 May 1849. On the continent, 1848 saw revolutions in France, Denmark, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Poland, the Italian states, the German states, and several other nations. Considering the ship of state metaphor, the Revolutions of 1848 are strong candidates for the multiple wrecks “strewn” across the sea. In *Fraser’s Magazine*, Carlyle refers to this period as the “scandalous Year of street-barricades and fugitive sham-kings.”¹⁰³ Although historians disagree as to the total number of casualties, 1848–49 brought about the death of tens of thousands of Europeans.¹⁰⁴ All of the uprisings ended in failure and military repression.¹⁰⁵ Although some revolutions deposed monarchs (some only temporarily), this wave of unrest ultimately reified governmental control.¹⁰⁶

*Villette*’s second shipwreck displays a keen awareness of revolution and the legitimacy of rule. Note the allusions to sovereignty and sovereign rule—not only the explicit example of the
morning skies, which rise “glorious, royal, purple as the monarch in his state,” but also the “sun returned,” whose “light was night to some!” “Glorious” recalls the Glorious Revolution of 1688, invoked by both Burke and Thomas Paine in their respective critique and justification of revolution. J. G. A. Pocock notes that authors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used their discussions of the early events of the French Revolution to continue the “century-old debate about the true meaning of the Glorious Revolution,” which had “come about without civil war, without a dissolution of the government, and without any interlude of rule by plebian religious fanatics.” Burke argued that change should come civilly and gradually; he feared that long-standing tradition would be swept away by a single, stormy revolution. Paine, however, argued that if the structure of tradition was too strong, a revolution is justified in wiping the slate clean. With the swiftness of Paine in mind, we might even take all of the turbulent weather in Villette’s second shipwreck as a reference to the storming of the Bastille.

In France, the Revolution of 1848 led to a crucial coup d’état—and I believe that we can draw this history out of the second shipwreck in Villette. At the end of the passage, the “sun returned” whose “light was night to some!” could refer to any number of monarchs whose (fore) fathers were deposed from the throne and whose policies divided the people. A possible contender is Charles II of England, but I believe the reference here is to Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoléon Bonaparte and the man who later declared himself Napoleon III. During the first years of his rule as emperor, from 1852–62, he censored his political opponents and sent around six thousand people either to prison or penal colonies. Others—including Hugo—voluntarily went into exile abroad. Lucy’s own portrayal of Paul supports this theory, for twice in the novel she describes the fiery schoolteacher as “Napoleonic.” The first reference unequivocally equates Paul with Napoleon I: Lucy writes that “he had points of
resemblance to Napoleon Bonaparte,” and claims that “in a love of power, in an eager grasp after supremacy, M. Emmanuel was like Bonaparte” (pp. 348 and 349). Her second reference, however, leaves room for interpretation. Paul pulls on Lucy’s ear and advises her to come along to the picnic in the countryside; Lucy calls this ear-pulling a “Napoleonic compliment” (p. 378). In the endnotes to the 2008 Oxford edition of *Villette*, Smith and Rosengarten note that Bonaparte sometimes showed affection for subordinates by pulling their ears or tapping their cheeks (p. 530n378). Yet Paul’s imperiousness echoes that of Napoléon III, the forceful president who staged a *coup d’état* in order to stay in office beyond his constitutionally mandated term. This occurs in December 1851, at the same time that Brontë was writing *Villette*. Simon Avery seems to be the only critic that recognizes the significance of such simultaneity. He highlights the political charge of Brontë’s last-written novel: “As the Second French Republic fell and Napoleon III became Emperor, Charlotte returned to dealing with European politics in that strange and fascinating ‘heretic narrative,’ *Villette*. ” Paul, I believe, stands in for both Napoléon I and Napoléon III—a claim that raises the stakes of the very first line of the passage, “he is coming.” A Napoléon returning to the throne several decades into the so-called Pax Britannica would certainly create waves in Britain. I again draw attention to the beginning of the passage, the ominous “he is coming,” written in the present tense.

Reading Paul as Napoléon also raises the stakes of the ambiguous ending of *Villette*. Again, my interest here is not if Paul actually lives or dies but rather the uncertainty which surrounds his fate. I feel that the doubt and unease that characterizes the narrative disappearance of Paul echoes the precarious position of Europe—especially that of Britain—in the middle of the nineteenth century. The political and historical waters were churning, set into motion by the Napoleonic Wars, the French Revolutions, and the Revolutions of 1848. Moreover, Brontë
publishes *Villette* in 1853, the year that saw the beginning of the Crimean War, wherein the English allied with the French. (We might see a trace of this alliance in the complex relationship between Lucy and Paul, the Englishwoman and the Frenchman, respectively.) The war pulled Royal Navy ships away from both sides of the Atlantic and, as a result, released pressure on the illegal slave trade in the West Indies and on the African coastline. This takes us back to the first shipwreck, for we must not forget the racial trauma that lies beneath the surface of *Villette*. Paul himself is repeated racialized, equated with colonized or exploited non-whites. In her very first description of the schoolmaster, Lucy calls him a “dark and spare man,” imagery that arguably recalls underfed slaves (p. 66). Later, Lucy offers a similar portrait, depicting Paul as a “dark little man … pungent and austere” (p. 129). Her characterization becomes even more explicit near the end of the novel, likening the schoolmaster to a foreign animal: she sees his face, “which had struck me when I entered as bearing a close and picturesque resemblance to that of a black and sallow tiger” (p. 325). How, then, should we understand M. Paul Emmanuel, the man who looks like a slave but acts like an emperor? The slave-cum-emperor embodies a political puzzle. Britain faced a similar similar conundrum, caught between the slave revolutions to the west (Jamaica, Demerera, Saint Vincent, Grenada, Barbados, Dominica, etc.) and the imperial expansion to the east (France and Russia, among others). Britain looked across the channel and saw a new Napoléon. What was to be done? *Villette* offers no explicit solution. The novel seems not to know what to do with the dark, imperious Paul; he drops out of the narrative without explanation. His fate is a secret.

But this is not the only secret of *Villette*’s second shipwreck. Traditionally, scholars turn to Brontë’s biography to explain the novel’s ambiguous ending. I, however, believe that Paul’s shipwreck points not only inward to Brontë’s life but also outward to her historical context.
Within the wreck of “Paul Napoléon” lies an open secret, the turbulent history of the European ship of state. Through Lucy, Brontë criticizes those who conveniently forget a violent past in order to render a more peaceful present. Britain must remember what France has forgotten; the British must not be misled by political (mis)representations. As Lucy herself exclaims, “Vive l’Angleterre, l’Histoire et les Héros! A bas la France, la Fiction et les Faquins!” (“Long live England, History, and Heroes! Down with France, Fiction, and Villains!”) (p. 341). Consider the penultimate paragraph of Villette, which follows the description of the second shipwreck:

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life (p. 496).

Here Lucy’s tongue is set firmly in her cheek. She histrionically tells readers not to worry, not to fear that anything bad would happen. She facetiously invites them to imagine whatever kind of future makes them happiest. In this ideal world, the “joy,” “rapture,” and “wondrous reprieve” is “theirs to conceive”; the “great terror,” “peril,” and “dread” of the past can be forgotten. Lucy’s overemphasis on the future begs the question of the past and present; she theatrically calls attention to that which is hidden, forgotten, or erased. The overdramatic nature of her appeal is, according to Miller, a prerequisite of the open secret. Lucy’s irony simultaneously reveals and conceals the very real “great terror,” “peril,” and “dread” of her present moment—the threats of revolution in the West Indies and of a new Napoléon in France. In terms of the ship of state, the danger of political wreck persists. Yes, “the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks,” the flotsam and jetsam of the Napoleonic Wars, the French Revolutions, and the uprisings of 1848. The “roar[ing],” “frenzied” storm has stopped—for now. Note the conditional tense of the next line: “Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings
whose waft was thunder—the tremor of whose plumes was storm.” The threat of revolution has not passed. To extend the metaphor, both Lucy and Britain are in the eye of the storm.

CONCLUSION

As we come to the end of our analytical journey, I want to make clear that I have not definitively unlocked Brontë’s two “little puzzles.” History may be the “key,” but it is also part of the “recalcitrance” previously identified by Glen. History is the open secret: we know that it is there, waiting to be spoken, but we can never fully articulate it. As several nineteenth-century readers attest, there is a *je ne sais quoi* about *Villette*. George Eliot writes that “[t]here is something almost preternatural in its power.” Margaret Oliphant uses a fitting metaphor about reading *Villette*: “What we feel is a force which makes everything real—a motion which is irresistible. We are swept on in the current, and never draw breath till the tale is ended.” I believe that this unspeakable quality, this “force” that sweeps us along in the current, is history. It is a history that sits uncomfortably with the reader, stirring unrest in their forgetful minds that hope for “joy,” “rapture,” “wondrous reprieve,” and a “happy succeeding life.” In the words of Harriet Martineau, “[a]n atmosphere of pain hangs about the whole, forbidding that repose which we hold to be essential to the true presentment of any large portion of life and experience.”

The traces of trauma carry *Villette* to the limits of representation, creating a fragmentary historical narrative that resists articulation as a coherent whole. The novel possesses a troubled, troubling history as its open secret. Hence Matthew Arnold’s response to the question, “[w]hy is *Villette* disagreeable?”: “Because the writer’s mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion, and rage, and therefore that is all she can, in fact, put into her book.”

Arnold’s mention of “the writer” again raises the question of *Villette* as autobiography. Throughout this project I have resisted the urge to use Brontë’s biography as my main bank of
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Evidence. The traumatic nature of Villette’s secret history impels me to look for collective rather than individual trauma. As Jeffrey C. Alexander explains, although individual experiences of pain constitute the collective trauma, the collective identity—such as that of race, gender, nation, class, etc.—ultimately “defines the suffering at stake.” That said, a biographical approach certainly supports my argument. The Brontë family read Blackwood’s and Fraser’s Magazine, two periodicals from which I have drawn several sources. Brontë herself read Carlyle’s Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (1838–39), reading the chapters “Signs of the Times” and “Characteristics” with “great interest.” Moreover, she was fascinated with French language and culture. While a teacher at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels, Brontë wrote a flattering “devoir” (an educational exercise) on Napoléon Bonaparte. Here she gives voice to the late emperor, speaking from his perspective: “I know what the wars are from which Europe still bleeds, like a victim under the butcher’s knife.” In terms of slavery, Christopher Heywood argues that the Brontë sisters had “access to the confidential history” of slavery through their neighbors in Yorkshire with plantation estates in Jamaica. Although Heywood’s only examples come from Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights (1847), he argues that the sisters possess a “skill in apportioning these hidden histories among their texts.” Similarly, Avery notes that the poetry of Charlotte and Anne in Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell (1846) repeatedly employs the language of slavery. Moreover, Brontë possessed a knowledge of Turner’s paintings. On her visit to London in 1849, she viewed a “beautiful exhibition of Turner’s paintings.” Back in Yorkshire, Brontë saw “one or two private collections of Turner’s best water-colour drawings,” which “were indeed a treat.” Moreover, Brontë had read John Ruskin’s Modern Painters (1834–60), which champions the genius of Turner. In a letter to W. S. Williams, Brontë asks, “[w]ho can read these glowing descriptions of Turner’s works without
longing to see them?” One of these “glowing descriptions” in *Modern Painters* was Ruskin’s “word picture” of Turner’s *Slave Ship*. Rather interestingly, Ruskin’s ekphrasistic language echoes Brontë’s description of the second shipwreck in *Villette*. (In fact, both Ruskin and Brontë had the same publisher.) Lastly, Brontë wrote *Villette* at the same time that she was reading Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). However, Brontë explicitly denies that *Villette* features any overt political commentary like that of Stowe:

You will see that ‘Villette’ touches on no matter of public interest. I cannot write books handling the topics of the day—it is of no use trying. Nor can I write a book for its moral—Nor can I take up a philanthropic scheme thought I honor philanthropy—And voluntarily and sincerely I veil my face before such a might subject as that handled in Mrs. Beecher Stowe’s work—‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ … To manage these great matters rightly they must be long and practically studied—their bearings known intimately and their evils felt genuinely—they must not be taken up as a business-matter and a trading-speculation.

History, Brontë suggests, must not be taken up insincerely. The evils of the past and present “must not be taken up as a business-matter and a trading-speculation.” Moreover, representing trauma requires a long gaze; one may not have the proper perspective of a recent upheaval in their given moment. Instead, these “great matters … must be long and practically studied.” As such, Brontë denies the potential political and historical harbored in *Villette*. To represent contemporary evils such as slavery or revolution runs the risk of myopia, of reenacting, mishandling, or exacerbating the loss. Brontë’s reluctance here arises from the fact that trauma has a long life. Put simply, problems stick around: the evils of slavery persist, a new Napoléon arises, and the villains live on at the end of *Villette* (“Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died” [p. 496].)

Hence if Brontë’s “little puzzles” are about slavery and revolution—two traumatic discourses which possess a longue durée of effect—then they must remain unsolved. To assume to have “solved” the puzzles would be tantamount to solving the problems of slavery and
revolution—a task far beyond the scope of a single author, novel, or reader. The closest we can come to unlocking them is through literary history, through the fictionalized representations, manifestations, and traces of a very real past. Fiction provides us with the mechanism to glimpse at that which may have otherwise been lost. The two shipwrecks of Villette rise up like buoys, marking the historical wreckage sunken below. In this sense, the shipwrecks are the puzzle, but they also are the key. This is perhaps a paradox, but so is the open secret.

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**Figure 1:** J. M. W. Turner, *Disaster at Sea* (c. 1835), oil on canvas, 171.4 x 220.3 cm.
Figure 2: J. M. W. Turner, *The Slave Ship, Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhon Coming On* (1840), oil on canvas, 90.8 x 122.6 cm.


4 Miller, p. 207.

5 Helene Moglen, for example, suggests that *Villette* “gathers together the threads of all of the fictions and fragments of [Brontë’s] life” (*Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived* [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1984], p. 229). Many scholars note that Brontë’s fourth and last-written novel, *Villette*, proved hard to complete. Critics often cite Brontë’s time at the Brussels boarding school as the cause: “[h]er months as a pupil and then teacher at the Pensionnat Heger turned out to be both traumatic and transformative” (Dinah Birch, “Charlotte Brontë,” in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], p. 31).


8 Postcolonial critics make much of Bertha Mason (see Spivak, “Literature,” in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* [Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999], pp. 112–197). Scholars of trauma studies gravitate toward the “red room” scene in *Jane Eyre* (see Sue Thomas, *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], p. 21; and Jill L. Matus, *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* [New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009], p. 1). Thomas argues that the signs of empire and political identity formation in *Jane Eyre* have been “massively under-read” (p. 4). Unfortunately, her gaze does not extend beyond *Jane Eyre*. Glen, however, is the rare critic that does unpack *Villette*, and inventively so. Glen argues for Brontë’s acute social awareness, connecting the language of vision and visual metaphors, the motifs of spectacle and surveillance, and display in *Villette* to the Great Exhibition of 1851.


10 Serena Cant proposes that shipwrecks “provide the key not only to unlocking England’s maritime past, but to placing that past in its global context” (*England’s Shipwreck Heritage: From Logboats to U-boats* [Swindon: English Heritage, 2013], p. xi).


13 Cant, p. ix. With the invention of the telegraph, periodicals such as *Lloyd’s List* (as well as other publications not focused solely on maritime trade) could publish hour-by-hour accounts of a wreck (ibid.).

14 For literature, besides the obvious example of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe, we might look to *The Shipwreck* (1762) by William Falconer; “The Witch of Atlas” (1820, published 1824) by Percy Bysshe Shelley (who himself died at sea, when his sailboat capsized during a storm in the Mediterranean); *Don Juan* (1819) by George Gordon, Lord Byron (which alludes to a series of actual wrecks—see Barry Venning, “A Macabre Connoisseurship: Turner, Byron, and the Apprehension of Shipwreck Subjects in Early Nineteenth-Century England,” *Art History* 8, 3 [Sept. 1985]: 303–19, p. 308); and “To the Same Flower” by William Wordsworth (based upon the wreck of the *Abergavenny*, which was captained by his brother, John Wordsworth). We might also consider works like *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* by Herman Melville, published in 1852, just a year before *Villette*. For visual art, we might look to *Dismasted Brig* (c. 1823) by John Sell Cotsman; *The Abandoned* (1856) by Clarkson Stanfield;
Shipwreck (1793) by George Morland; Shipwreck (1843) and Shipwreck Against a Setting Sun (c. 1850) by Francis Danby; as well as Shipwreck (1805) and Wreck of a Transport Ship (c. 1810) by J. M. W. Turner.

Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby writes that shipwrecks “were so commonplace in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that their narratives were common knowledge” (“Food Chains: French Abolitionism and Human Consumption,” in An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World, 1660–1830, ed. Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz [Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003], pp. 153–75, 157). Jampoler notes that in the nineteenth century, “well-documented or even mysterious losses of ships at sea were commonplace” (p. 9).


Charlotte Brontë, Villette, ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), p. 35. Subsequent references to Villette are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text and endnotes by page number.

From the King James Version of the New Testament. In these verses, Paul is being sent to Rome as a prisoner. He is accused of stirring discontent through his preaching, but he had committed no actual crime. With no evidence against him, he insists upon appealing his imprisonment before Caesar himself, which was his right as a Roman citizen (see Anthony Brandt, ed., The Tragic History of the Sea: Shipwrecks from the Bible to Titanic [Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2006], p. 21).


Hall, pp. 240 and 249.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Carlyle, “Occasional Discourse,” p. 673. Carlyle’s essay takes to task Exeter Hall and other abolitionist movements for their delusional “rosepink Sentimentalism,” a move towards equality and democracy that flies in the face of the natural order of things (p. 671). At the core of the essay, however, lies not a simple
racial hatred but rather an incisive indictment of capitalist exchange, a system Carlyle dubs “the Dismal Science” (p. 672).


31 Ibid.


33 Sandner, p. 71.

34 Ibid.

35 Glen, p. 254.


37 McCoubrey, p. 320.

38 Costello, pp. 205–6.


41 Ibid.

42 McCoubrey, pp. 312 and 320.

43 Thomas Clarkson, for example, places shipwreck within an overtly Christian framework: the storm was the “Christian God’s condemnation of the slave captain,” and abolition resulted from the “guiding force of Christianity” (Costello, pp. 212–3.

44 The Medusa was a French ship transporting Liberal abolitionist colonists to Senegal. When she was beached in the Bay of Arguin, off the coast of Mauritania, in 1816, only fifteen of the four hundred people aboard survived. Critics seized upon the wreck of the Medusa to attack the Bourbon Restoration government and condemn its sanction of the slave trade (Grigsby, pp. 155 and 168). As for The Deluge, McCoubrey calls attention to the “heroically represented black man supporting a female victim” (p. 332); Venning notes that “the large negro in Turner’s painting is a recurring figure within the iconography of wreck subjects” (p. 316).


46 Freud, p. 37.

47 Cathy Caruth, Literature in the Ashes of History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013), p. 57. Earlier, Caruth argues that “[w]hat comes back with each pull of the string … may not simply be the return of understanding but also the return and disappearance of a history that cannot be exhaustively defined by either consciousness or the acquired theory of psychoanalytic thought” (pp. ix–x).

48 Caruth, p. xi.

Hannah Arendt outlines the concept of the “modern lie,” the role of falsehood in the sphere of political action. According to Caruth, Arendt helps us see how political history is “fundamentally linked, at certain points in modern times, to its erasure or lack of witness” (Caruth, p. 39).

Roach, p. 4.


The captain of the Zong later attempted to collect insurance in Jamaica for his “lost” cargo: legally, he could collect insurance on slaves “lost at sea” but not those who died aboard. When the insurers refused to pay, the case was taken to court. In the subsequent decision, the jettison of slaves was criminalized, and the court held that “slaves must henceforth be treated not as inanimate cargo but as human beings” (John McCoubrey, “Turner’s Slave Ship: Abolition, Ruskin, and Reception,” Word & Image 14, 4 [Oct.–Dec. 1998]: 319–53, 321).

Costello, pp. 102–3.

Costello, p. 101. Most newspapers and journals reported that the captain refused assistance out of fear that he would be financially responsible for any convicts that landed illegally in France. An article from Fraser’s Magazine, however, contradicts these accounts that speak of the selfishness and cruelty of the captain. Instead, the author decries the “cowardice and apathy” of the French sailors and spectators on shore, who failed to put out a rescue boat, restricted access to the dying women, and later plundered the still-warm bodies. The author cries, “No one who has not witnessed such a frightful scene can imagine one tenth part of its horrors!” (“The Loss of the Amphitrite: An Account, by an Eye-Witness, of the Wreck of the ‘Amphitrite,’ August 31st and September 1st, 1833, on the Coast of Boulogne,” Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country 8, 47 [Nov. 1833]: 557–60, pp. 557–9).

Jampoler, p. 8;


Ibid.

Costello, p. 103.

Costello, p. 102.

The verse-tag in the Royal Academy catalog comes from Turner’s manuscript poem, Fallacies of Hope, and reifies the paintings engagement with the issue of jettison:

“Aloft all hands, strike the top-masts and belay;
Yon angry setting sun and fierce-edged clouds
Declare the Typhon’s coming.
Before it sweeps your deck throw overboard
The dead and dying—ne’er heed their chains
Hope, Hope, Fallacious Hope!
Where is thy market now?” (qtd. in Costello, p. 205, emphasis added).


Costello, p. 206.
64 Costello, pp. 203–4. As figured by Romanticism and the Scottish Enlightenment, modernity “was no longer to be understood in terms of a universally experience, homogenized time, but rather as a fractured, locally heterogeneous temporality” (Costello, p. 208).


67 Costello proclaims that the figure is “undeniably female” and notes that nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century critics rarely take gender into account when reading the painting. Critics always see the leg but almost always cannot see the breasts (or chose not to see the breasts) (p. 209).

68 Costello, p. 224.


72 LaCapra, p. 162.

73 Costello, p. 223.


76 Kaplan, p. 66.

77 In the latter category is Judith Butler, who argues against the idea of a privatizing or depoliticizing grief. She contends that trauma “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order” (p. 22). Similarly, Kaplan notes that the need to share and “translate” trauma renders it difficult to separate individual and collective trauma” (p. 1).

78 Glen, p. 256.


80 Derrida, pp. 16–7.

81 Dominick LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), p. 78.


83 Miller, p. 203.
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86 “Bankrupts were often depicted as shipwrecks, floundering and splashing in their struggles to stay afloat, their very efforts to save themselves leading to the capsize of others” (Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* [1986; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001], pp. 147–8). Hilton notes that Edmund Burke urges readers to avoid “boundless oceans of debt”; Thomas Chalmers fears the “ocean of contingency” upon which businessmen precariously “float”; and “a thousand other writers denounced the “sea of speculation” (p. 147).

87 Hilton, p. 148.


98 “When we think of revolution, we almost automatically still think in terms of this imagery born in those years [of the various French Revolutions]—in terms of Desmoulins’ *torrent revolutionnaire* on whose rushing waves the actors of the revolution were borne and carried away until its undertow sucked them from the surface and their perished together with their foes” (Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* [1963; London: Penguin Group, 1990], p. 48).

99 Thomas, p. 13.

100 Qtd. in Thomas, p. 13.

101 “The West India Question,” p. 412. The article also notes that the “L.12,000,000 worth of British manufactures” accounts for nearly a third of all of Britain’s exports (p. 414).

102 Powell, p. 14. Based upon her reading of the hopeful-yet-hopeless new widows, Powell concludes that *The Field of Waterloo* is “one of the greatest anti-war pictures ever painted” (ibid.).


On February 22–24, 1848, workers, tradesmen, and artisans marched through the Paris streets; as a result, King Louis Philippe abdicated his throne and went into exile in Britain. On March 16, after facing a series of protests, King Ludwig I of Bavaria abdicated in favor of his son, Maximilian II. Also in March 1848, Prince Clemens von Metternich, the State Chancellor and Foreign Minister of the Austrian Empire, was forced to resign and driven into exile in London, Brighton, and Brussels. On October 6–7, 1848, the citizens of Vienna protested against recent actions taken by their emperor in Hungary; afterwards, Emperor Ferdinand I fled to Moravia. Later, on December 2, 1848, Ferdinand officially abdicated the throne, leaving control of the country to his nephew, Franz Joseph. However, by the end of the revolutions, absolute monarchy had been reestablished in Germany, Austria, and Italy. Police forces were strengthened and the popular press persecuted. In France, a coup d'état lead to the fall of the Second French Republic and the rise of the Second French Empire (as discussed above).


Burke makes several references to storms in his Reflections (see pp. 22, 61, 102, and 124).

Paine includes two instances of the ship of state metaphor in Rights of Man: the first noting the National Assembly’s hope that some of its principles “might have the chance of surviving the wreck,” and the second describing William Pitt as coming to the “helm” of Britain after a storm (pp. 104 and 314).


Paul apparently comes from Spanish stock, but he seems to identify himself as decidedly French.

In her Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857), Elizabeth Gaskell explains how Brontë’s father desired a happy ending for the story, disliking “novels which left a melancholy impression on the mind.” Gaskell, however, makes clear that “the idea of M. Paul Emmanuel’s death at sea was stamped on [Brontë’s] imagination … All she could do in compliance with her father’s wish was so to veil the fate in oracular words, as to leave it to … the discernment of her readers to interpret her meaning (The Life of Charlotte Brontë, 2 vols. [New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1857], 2: 219). Many critics have followed in Gaskell’s footsteps since 1857.

Miller does not discuss Brontë or Villette specifically. He does, however, explain that “in theatrically continuing to keep my secret, I have already rather given it away” (Miller, p. 194, original emphasis).


125 Qtd. in Gaskell, p. 204. The passage begins with Brontë’s proclamation that “Napoleon did not think of himself as a man, but as the embodiment of a nation” (ibid.).


127 Heywood, p. 185.

128 Avery, p. 263.


132 McCoubrey writes that John Ruskin “gave meaning to Turner’s seascape and its intense colors by recreating for his readers his own, emotionally charged response to Turner’s painting” (p. 346).

133 Ruskin sees a “the fire of the sunset” with “burning clouds,” mirroring Lucy’s exclamation that “the heavens are one flame.” Above Ruskin’s “[P]urple and blue” waves hangs a “shadow[y]” sky of a “fearful hue”; the masts of the ship are “written upon the sky in lines of blood” (Ruskin, *Modern Painters* [London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1879], pp. 376–8). Lucy’s wreck similarly features a “full and dark” sky with clouds of “strange forms”; the “wild,” “bloody” sunrise “rival[s] battle at its thickest.”