5 Symbols in Villette

Understanding symbols is an important part of reading literature. With a symbol, the author is evoking other ideas or meanings. For example, fire is a symbol of passion for many people. Like other works of literature, Villette has many symbols. Let's find out 5 of the most important uses of symbolism in Charlotte Bronte's Villette.

The Ocean

The ocean and water generally play an important part in the symbolism of Villette. In fact, this symbolism is prevalent throughout the novel. Although it's only hinted early on, we later understand that Lucy Snowe's family was killed in a shipwreck several years earlier. Creating a striking and tragic parallel, Paul Emanuel goes on an ocean voyage later in the novel, and we understand he likely never returns. The narrator talks about the great storms on the ocean.

In Villette, the ocean is a dangerous place yet one of unrealized potential. Lucy's parents never come back from the ocean, and neither does Paul. As you may already know, water is considered a symbol of emotion in many cultures. We see this resonance in Villette, as well.

Mirrors

Lucy is confronted by an image of herself that she dislikes when she looks in the mirror. Her appearance does not conform to Victorian beauty standards, and she is harsh on herself for what she perceives as a shortcoming. The symbolism of the mirror is its power over Lucy, and it symbolizes her position as an outcast.

There is a particularly dramatic scene when the physically beautiful Ginevra Fanshawe demands that she and Lucy look in the mirror together, to compare their appearances.

Books

Books take on an aura of mystery in Villette. They are sources of potentially secret knowledge that Lucy does not realize she possesses. Paul Emanuel accuses Lucy of having read Latin books that she is unable to understand. This symbolizes how Paul sees who Lucy is at heart and her profound intelligence and meaning as a human being. Lucy is a book for Paul to read, and he does so quickly.

The Color Pink

Pink symbolizes confidence and the acknowledgement of beauty in Villette. Lucy is always afraid of wearing pink dresses, thinking she does not deserve to be displayed in that way. We see this significance in several instances. For example, when Lucy is reunited with her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, this kind lady insists that Lucy wear a pink dress for a trip to the theater. Later on in the novel, Paul Emanuel takes notice of Lucy's pink dress.

Twins

Charlotte Bronte's concept of spiritual "twins" is important in Villette. We see this at play in Lucy Snowe's relationship with Paul Emanuel. They recognize each other as spiritual twins, and they are even able to see lines of their physical features in each other's faces. Today, we would probably refer to this concept as the "twin flame."

The Theme of Courage in Villette by Charlotte Bronte

Courage is one of the primary themes in Villette by Charlotte Bronte, a novel first published in 1853. Two characters encapsulate the courage in Villette: Lucy Snowe and Paul Emanuel, the seemingly difficult character who Lucy discovers to be her spiritual "twin." In modern terms, we would call him a "twin flame" or soulmate.

Both Lucy and Paul show great courage. We learn they did so before the beginning of the narrative, and there is even more evidence of their bravery during the story itself. As a young and single woman in the Victorian period, it's extremely courageous for Lucy to move to a foreign country by herself. She is completely alone in the world, but she shows incredible determination and self-belief, as well as integrity.

In the same vein but a different sphere, Paul is also brave in his own life. Like Lucy, he has experienced tragedy and is alone. Lucy's courage is one of the aspects of her character that most intrigues and attracts Paul Emanuel.

EXCERPT FROM AN ARTICLE ON ELIZABETH I (written for a client in 2017)

As strange as it sounds to modern ears, it was normal for royal children to have households of their own. The baby Elizabeth's establishment was set up at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire. While Anne was still alive, the child was well-provided for and had all the luxuries appropriate for a princess. Everything changed after Anne was accused of adultery and beheaded on May 19, 1536. Elizabeth was only three years old when she lost her mother in this terrifying way.

Henry VIII married Jane Seymour a mere week after Anne's death. Within a year, she would give birth to Edward, Henry's long awaited male heir. Elizabeth was declared illegitimate, and her parents' marriage was annulled. Her title as princess was ruthlessly stripped away from her, and she was now called only the Lady Elizabeth. Henry cared for nothing but his new son, and everyone seemed to forget that there was a Tudor child living at Hatfield.

The money paid to Elizabeth's household to cover its expenses became woefully inadequate. Eventually, the little Elizabeth began to outgrow her clothes. As we read in "The Childhood of Queen Elizabeth I" at Elizabethan.era.org.uk, her governess, Lady Bryan, wrote to one of Henry's officials begging for funds and explaining that the little girl had "neither gown, nor kirtle, nor petticoat".

Jane Seymour died twelve days after giving birth. While she was still alive, she showed her kind nature by eventually persuading the selfish king to be kinder to his second daughter. After Jane, Henry married twice more before finally finding Catherine Parr, his final wife, in 1543. Catherine took the ten-year-old Elizabeth under her wing. She improved her program of education and engaged Roger Ascham, a famous Cambridge scholar, to teach her public speaking.

King Henry VIII died in 1547, when Elizabeth was 13. Prince Edward, at this point a nine-year-old boy, ascended to the throne. Elizabeth would soon go to live with Katherine Parr and her new husband, Thomas Seymour. Thomas Seymour molested her, and Elizabeth was sent away by her stepmother. After Catherine died in childbirth, Seymour was accused of plotting to kidnap Edward VI and marry Elizabeth, thus seizing the throne for himself. Elizabeth was dangerously caught up in this, with authorities believing that she conspired with Seymour. Luckily, she was able to prove her innocence.

Mary, Elizabeth's Catholic older half-sister, became Queen after Edward died in 1553. She accused Elizabeth of plotting with fellow Protestants to overthrow her. Elizabeth was subsequently sent to the dreaded Tower of London. After that, she was kept under house arrest in Woodstock, Oxfordshire. Mary died in 1558, and Elizabeth, now 25 years old, finally reached the throne.

After the neglect that she experienced as a child and dangerous situations she faced as an adolescent, it's little wonder Elizabeth would later declare in her "Response to a Parliamentary

Delegation on her Marriage" (1566) that "I am indeed endowed with such qualities that if I were turned out of the realm in my petticoat I were able to live in any place in Christendom".