



The  
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**(RE)PRESENTING THE BRONTËS:  
A STUDY OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION THROUGH MIRRORS,  
WINDOWS, AND PAINTINGS IN FIVE BRONTË NOVELS**

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## ABSTRACT

The Brontë sisters have long been recognised as what some would call proto-feminist writers. Their literary works collectively deal with the limitations of the female position and the contradictory experience of female identity in mid-nineteenth century society, and they often approach these issues in ways that have been considered rebellious or subversive. This thesis argues that a certain set of analogous images; mirrors, windows, and paintings, held a significant space in the Brontës' literary imagination and were employed to explore both the limits and potential liberations for the female position and its representations at the time they were writing.

Despite the frequency with which mirrors, windows, and paintings abound in the Brontës' novels, the importance of their symbolism has been given insufficient consideration. No critic has attempted a thorough analysis of these images in these works, and none have considered their relationship in a comparable study of this kind. Through close readings and the application of a feminist critical approach, drawing upon social and psychoanalytical theory where relevant, I demonstrate how these corresponding symbols were integral to the Brontës pioneering attempts at imagining new ways of seeing women in their social and narrative representations. In doing so, this thesis contributes to feminist studies on the Brontës by providing a nuanced understanding of the at times subversive, but at other times more conventional ways they depicted women's place in patriarchal society which they expressed through the comparably conflicted symbolism of mirrors, windows, and paintings.

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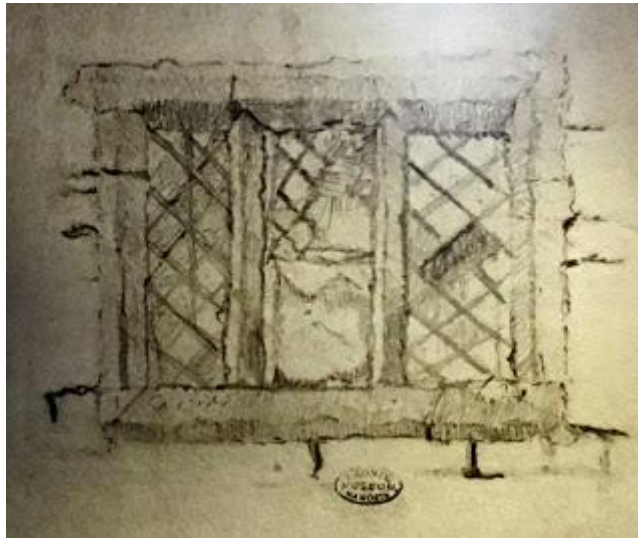
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## DECLARATION

*I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means ([www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.*

## INTRODUCTION



**Figure 1.1 Emily Brontë, Mullioned Window (1829)**

‘Mullioned window’ is the earliest surviving example of Emily Brontë’s art and is thought to have been produced when she was just 10 or 11 years old. In *The Art of the Brontës*, Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars state that the drawing “is typical of the plates included in contemporary drawing manuals devoted to ‘landscape embellishments’”, manuals which the Brontë children would have studied as part of their domestic artistic training.<sup>1</sup> However, to those familiar with Emily Brontë’s oeuvre, this image of a mullioned window feels more significant than simply representing a ‘typical’ example of her amateur artistic study. This is because windows abound as symbolically imbued objects in her work. Take, for instance, the poem ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ (1842-3). Here the speaker and present resident of Aspin Castle tells with suspicion the tale of its supposed haunting by its first occupant. Although no ghost is explicitly uncovered, haunting is implied by the moonlight which shines through the window onto a hall of portraits, bestowing them with spectral animation: “And when the moonbeam, chill and blue, / Streams the spectral windows through, / That picture’s like a spectre too”.<sup>2</sup> Although the image conjured may give the sense that the ‘chill’, ‘blue’ moonlight upon the pictures is the source of their spectral animation, Brontë’s reference to ‘the spectral windows’ reveals that a transformation of the moonlight occurs *through* the glass. Two readings are possible here. Either the moonlight and window combine to create an optical illusion, or the window marks a space

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars, *The Art of the Brontës* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.108.

<sup>2</sup> Emily Brontë, ‘Written in Aspin Castle’, in Janet Gezari ed. *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp.139-142 (p.141), lines 56-58.

of magical unveiling through which the passing moonlight shines to reveal the phantom figures within the portraits, the reality of which the secular speaker is unable to acknowledge. In either reading, the window is associated with haunting and with an unclear or troubled vision.

It is in a similar context that the window later appears in Brontë's sole novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), but with emphasis on a specifically female haunting. The first of many significant window scenes in *Wuthering Heights* occurs when Mr. Lockwood, the text's most external narrator and tenant at Mr. Heathcliff's Thrushcross Grange, is forced to stay the night at his landlord's abode, Wuthering Heights, due to bad weather. Lockwood sleeps inside an unusual casement bed, resembling a coffin but walled by a window, and within it he experiences strange dreams. In one such dream he attempts to stifle the tapping of a fir bough against the window. Unable to unclasp the hinge, he breaks through the glass to stifle the sound, but rather than clasping his grip on the branch his "fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand!" (30).<sup>3</sup> This hand belongs to the deceased Catherine Linton who has been "a waif for twenty years!" (31) and demands repeatedly to be let back into the Heights. The spectral influence of the deceased Catherine haunts the window and the narrative thereafter, but whether her status as apparition is to be taken literally or not is a question that, like in 'Aspin Castle', is never laid to rest. What these texts confirm is that Emily Brontë was interested in the window as a symbolic space in her imagined worlds, one that appears to have a particular association with uncertain or unreliable vision and with haunting, especially female haunting. If we were to agree with Janet Gezari's reading of 'mullioned window' as containing, "[A] shape like a hand break[ing] through the glass at the right of the central section", then Brontë's first recorded window, a specifically violated one, may be considered an image much mediated on throughout her creative pursuits and one far less 'typical' than Alexander and Sellars suggest.<sup>4</sup>

When I began to consider the surprising frequency with which Emily Brontë references windows in her work and to what effects, scenes from her sisters' novels also inevitably came to mind. Certainly, if *Wuthering Heights* conjures the image of Catherine's ghost at the window in the popular imagination, as its film and musical adaptations would have us believe, then *Jane Eyre* (1847) conjures the image of a young Jane at the beginning of the novel, "mounted into the window-seat" at Gateshead Hall, "shrined in double retirement" between the curtain and the window which serves the purpose of "protecting, but not separating" her from "the drear November day" (4).<sup>5</sup> As I explore in

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<sup>3</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. by Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack (Oxford & London: Oxford University Press; The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of the Brontës: 1976).

<sup>4</sup> Emily Brontë, *The Annotated 'Wuthering Heights'*, ed. by Janet Gezari (Cambridge & Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), p.73.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, the chorus of Kate Bush's popular 1978 debut single, 'Wuthering Heights', reinterprets the scene of Catherine's ghost attempting to get back into the Heights via the window. For an exploration of how



the first chapter of this thesis, Jane's association with the liminal space of the window sets up her comparably liminal position in society as an orphaned girl and unwanted outcast at her aunt's home. The window is thus utilised as a space reflective of an element of the female position. However, the window also works as a highly visual image in this opening scene. As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas points out, the use of the term 'mount' creates an image of Jane framed like a painting.<sup>6</sup> Associations with the visual arts are furthered as Jane studies a copy of "Bewick's History of British Birds" (4) in which "[E]ach picture told a story" (5). Jane conjures narratives from its illustrations rather than its text, thus inverting the traditional reading experience of accessing the visual through language.

The highly visual descriptions in this scene have been considered by some critics to reflect the wider method of story-telling Jane adopts through her first-person narration. For instance, Alexander and Sellars describe Jane's language as "word-painting", and Lawrence Starzyk has referred to her, in reference to the narrative as an autobiography, as creating a "verbal *and* visual portrait".<sup>7</sup> As the relationship between the window and painting or portrait established in the opening scene of *Jane Eyre* is visible in 'Written in Aspin Castle' also, it can certainly be suggested that these images were seen to share complimentary associations as visual symbols. But as the following scene in *Jane Eyre* reveals, there is a further framed, visual image that can be considered in relation to windows and paintings: the mirror. Just moments after Jane is ordered from her window recess by the tyrannical John Reed, she is banished by her aunt to the supposedly haunted red room. Here the windows which previously provided her visual freedom are 'muffled' to reinforce her imprisonment, "to my left were the muffled windows; a great looking-glass between them" (12), but they also frame a mirror which encourages a new kind of vision. Indeed, the framing of the muffled windows either side of a mirror forces Jane to engage in a literal and metaphorical act of 'self-reflection'. Perceiving herself in the mirror as an unrecognisable 'Other', Jane sees herself as society sees her, and this leads to her revolt.

By just the second chapter of *Jane Eyre*, the symbolism of mirrors, windows, and paintings are drawn upon for their ability to dramatise 'framed' or arrested images that draw attention to issues of the female position and its representations. As the first chapter of this thesis will reveal, in *Jane Eyre*, the issues explored include women's marginalisation in society due to their limited social and occupational roles, and most significantly, their marginalisation and lack of power in their romantic

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the window has been interpreted as a central space in film adaptations of the novel, see Monika Pietrzak-Franger, 'Adapting Victorian Novels: The Poetics of Glass in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*', *Adaption*, 5:2 (2012), pp.268-273., Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. by Jane Jack & Margaret Smith (Oxford & London: Oxford University Press; The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of the Brontës: 1975).

<sup>6</sup> Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, "Portrait of a Governess, Disconnected, Poor, and Plain': Staging the Spectral Self in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*", *Brontë Studies*, 34:2 (2013), pp.127-137.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander & Sellars, *The Art of the Brontës*, p.56., Lawrence Starzyk, "'The gallery of memory": The Pictorial in *Jane Eyre*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 33:3 (1997), pp. 288-309 (p.290).

relationships and in the institution of marriage. In this novel, the mirror is employed most frequently to explore these issues. However, once recognised, images of mirrors, windows, and paintings appear readily throughout the work of the Brontë sisters. Although each author and each text focus on various facets of female experience, as I will explore in more detail in the chapter summaries that close this introduction, they are united by the way in which they employ these symbols to express issues of the female position and their narrative representations. As I have begun to outline, the function of these symbols has received some previous critical attention. However, not only have they not been considered in a sustained study, but none have recognised their functions as symbols for narrative as I do in this thesis. Indeed, as I have started to reveal, mirrors, windows and paintings work symbolically within the Brontës' novels to express issues and anxieties associated with female experience. However, when considering how they are employed to comment upon the difficulties of representing those experiences, I demonstrate how they function as metaphors for narrative itself, thus revealing a previously unrecognised function of these symbols in these works.

Before I address the extent to which these concepts have been previously considered, it is first useful to isolate the images of mirrors, windows, and paintings and consider their existing connotations as literary symbols which may have led to their use for exploring issues relating to female experience. I have acknowledged that these are highly visual images, and this visual element is important to the way they are employed as tools for exploring representation. For instance, as this thesis will reveal, the Brontës draw upon mirrors, windows, and paintings to imagine and explore how women see and depict themselves and their roles in society, and to challenge how the society in which they lived saw and depicted them in return. There is thus a tension to be found in these texts between patriarchal representations of women and women's attempts at self-representation, and each of these symbols act to highlight this tension in differing ways. I will begin with the mirror, which has been extensively researched as a historical object and which feminist criticism has revealed to have the most explicit association with women.

Studies on the social history of the mirror have revealed its dominant cultural and psychological associations with women since its invention. As Hope Werness explains in *The Symbolism of Mirrors in Art From Ancient Times to the Present*,

the earliest objects believed to be mirrors, dating around c.6000-5900 BCE, come from the matriarchal culture of Catal Huyuk. The Egyptian word for mirror, ankh (meaning both mirror and eternal life), derived from Libyan and Phoenician images of the goddess.<sup>8</sup>

Werness reveals the mirror's origins as a positive symbol for the goddess who was considered a 'reflector' of life and Earth. However, alongside studies such as Mark Pendergrast's *Mirror Mirror* and Sabine Melchior-Bonnet's *The Mirror: A History*, it has also been revealed that the mirror's original celebratory associations with women were short-lived as it is most recognisably employed in art and literature to warn of the dangers of narcissism and the threatening power of the female gaze.<sup>9</sup> Jenijoy La Belle's study, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass*, was the first of its kind to consider the woman writer's use of the mirror for exploring female identity in literature.<sup>10</sup> However, she first draws attention to how women have been associated with mirrors in male-authored artistic and literary representations to perpetuate idealised images of femininity and to condemn women through associations with destructive vanity and self-indulgence.

To put forth a nineteenth century example, we may consider Max Klinger's etching, *Eve and the Future: The Serpent* (1880), which reconfigures a depiction of the Christian Eve at the moment of the first sin by having the serpent hold up a mirror to reflect back to the woman, and the viewer, the image of her forbidden, consummated desire. Here the mirror symbolises female vanity and self-indulgence which it associates with the fall of mankind. This condemnation of women by male artists is considered so common that it was famously satirised by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* where he wrote, "[Y]ou painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting 'Vanity,' thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure".<sup>11</sup> However, the notion that women are somehow uniquely bound to their bodies and to their physicality is an age-old concept that has been used to position women as objects in discourses of subjectivity since as early as Plato. Elizabeth Spelman has explored how Plato's work refers to women, alongside slaves and animals, as examples of those who are bound to the base, material drives of the body and thus cannot reach the enlightened state of mind or soul consciousness

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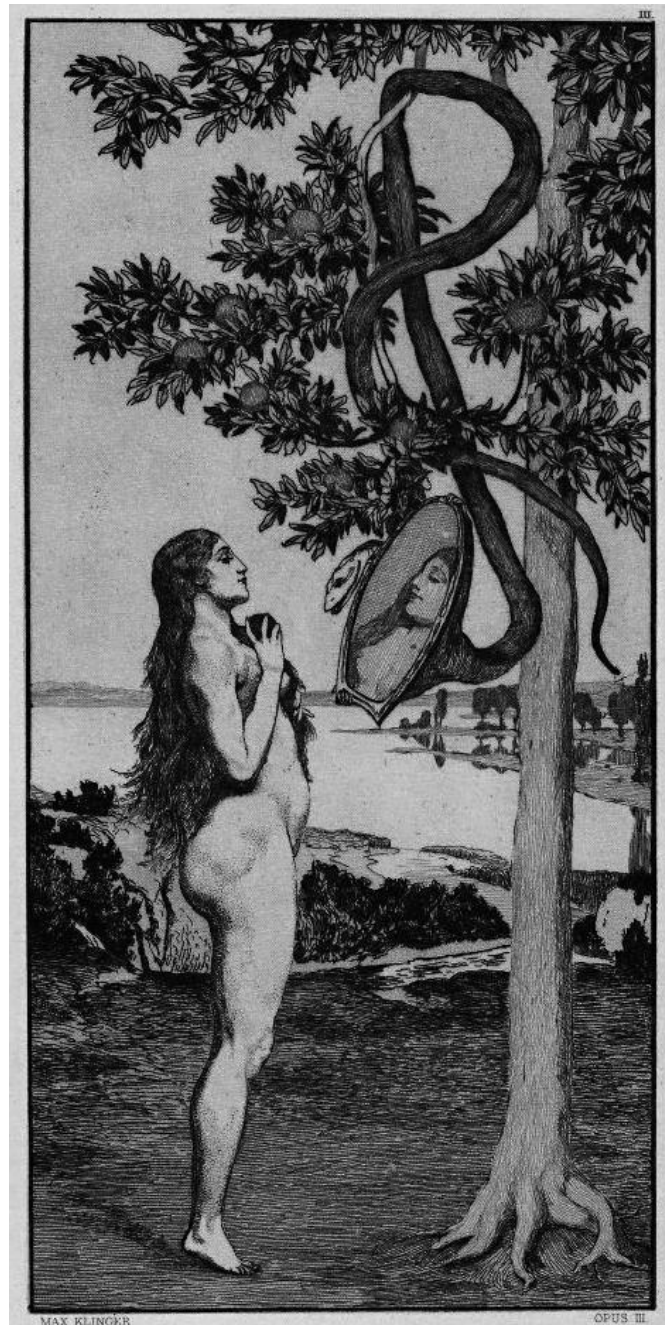
<sup>8</sup> Hope Werness, *The Symbolism of Mirrors in Art From Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), p.7.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Pendergrast, *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. by Katharine H. Jewett (London & New York: Routledge, 2001). See also Miranda Anderson ed., *The Book of the Mirror: An Interdisciplinary Collection Exploring the Cultural History of the Mirror* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), Helena Goscilo, 'The Mirror in Art: Vanitas, Veritas, and Vision', *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, 34:2 (2010), pp.282-319.

<sup>10</sup> Jenijoy La Belle, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1973), p.51.

achievable by men.<sup>12</sup> Feminist philosophers and critics, perhaps most famously Simone de Beauvoir, have responded to this by calling for the emancipation of women from the bodies they have been reduced and confined to, through their role as child-bearers for instance, which she believes has prevented them from reaching a state of transcendental, universal subjectivity.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 1.2 Max Klinger, *Eve and the Future: The Serpent* (1880)**

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth V. Spelman, 'Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views', *Feminist Studies*, 8:1 (1982), pp.109-131.

<sup>13</sup> See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997).

La Belle's study is sympathetic to the difficulties women face in overcoming this position. She considers how some women have internalised a patriarchal concept of their role as cultural objects which she believes is visible in the way they conform to a system which places their value in their physical appearance. She argues that as a result, mirror-gazing has become an integral part of identity building for some women as, "[M]en look at their faces and their bodies, but what they are is another matter entirely – ultimately, a transcendental concept of self [...] women explore the reaches of the mirror for what they really are".<sup>14</sup> In other words, women come into being through their bodies. Of course, establishing a sense of self through physical appearance is incredibly limiting for women, especially when that surface image is regulated by male-derived ideals of femininity. This is a concept Charlotte Brontë explores in *Villette* through a rejection of the mirror, as I will reveal in the first chapter. However, La Belle's study also acknowledges how some women writers have utilised mirror imagery in an attempt to reclaim a relationship with the self. I thus also reveal how in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë subverts the mirror as a patriarchal tool, a "glass coffin" in which woman is "to be displayed and desired", as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar wrote of the mirror in *Snow White*, and instead uses it in the process of self-definition.<sup>15</sup>

The mirror's association with identity, and in particular female identity, is more straightforward than windows or paintings. However, as Isobel Armstrong notes in *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880*, the "isolated figure at the window" is "an endemic image of nineteenth-century iconography".<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, those who have studied this iconographic image have noted that, "the 'figure at the window' is most often a woman".<sup>17</sup> There is thus a significant relationship to be accounted for between women and windows that was underway at the time the Brontës were writing. In her study of the window in art history, Sabine Rewald notes that, "[A]rtists have long been fond of the window motif" as "depictions of 'the woman at the window,' shown from the outside looking in, were popular in the fourth century B.C., as demonstrated by a large group of South Italian vases of that date".<sup>18</sup> However, it was Caspar David Friedrich's, *Woman at the Window* (1822), which reignited the trend for depicting female figures at the window in nineteenth century art.

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<sup>14</sup> La Belle, *Herself Beheld*, p.9.

<sup>15</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.41.

<sup>16</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University press, 2008), p.7.

<sup>17</sup> Sabine Rewald, *Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Rewald, *Rooms with a View*, p.15.



*Figure 1.3 Caspar David Friedrich, The Woman at the Window (1822)*

Friedrich's image has been referred to by Christopher Masters as, "undoubtedly one of the most influential paintings of the nineteenth century, having inspired a remarkable sequence of images in which a female figure, often alone, stands in front of a window".<sup>19</sup> Rewald reveals that Friedrich, "inaugurates the motif of the open window in Romantic painting", as a,

potent symbol for the experience of standing on the threshold between an interior and the outside world. The juxtaposition of the close familiarity of a room and the uncertain, often idealized vision of what lies beyond was immediately recognized as a metaphor for unfulfilled longing.<sup>20</sup>

However, Masters has looked beyond the Romantic connotations of this image by rightly acknowledging that although "the window is intended to represent aspects of human experience, above all its solitude and subjectivity", it also more specifically reflects "the condition of women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though that purpose may not have been foremost in the artists' minds".<sup>21</sup> Certainly, the image of the woman at the window is particularly reflective of the female position in the nineteenth century due to the way it highlights the conflict between domestic imprisonment and longing for freedom that defined many women's experience of their primary domestic role at the time.

Indeed, as a result of the industrial revolution, the nineteenth century saw the separation of public and private spheres as work moved away from the home and to the city. As a result, a new emphasis was given on women's domestic role as they were expected to be cultivators and protectors of a space of social and moral sanctuary. However, at the same time that the home was being promoted as a woman's 'proper place', women's literature from the period, including literature written by the Brontë sisters, reveals a sometimes covert, and other times explicit, restlessness with the limitations placed on women's roles in society. The image of the woman at the window aptly embodies this restlessness. The window offers visual access to the world beyond the home, providing a symbolic space for the contemplation of one's position and possible futures, (as Karen Hellman states, there is a prominent "conceptual theme" in art "that a window can evoke the passage of time").<sup>22</sup> However, by acting as a physical barrier also, the window highlights the cruel reality of women's limited opportunities in a patriarchal society which defined their roles as homemakers and afforded them little power or autonomy outside of the institution of marriage. As I will reveal in the second chapter of this thesis, much like the Victorian woman, the window embodies a position of

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher Masters, *Windows in Art* (London: Merrell, 2011), p.125.

<sup>20</sup> Rewald, *Rooms with a View*, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> Masters, *Windows in Art*, p.125.

<sup>22</sup> Karen Hellman, *The Window in Photographs* (USA: Getty Publications, 2013), p.15.

liminality, and its function in these texts, particularly in *Wuthering Height* which is the main focus of my chapter, is to highlight binaries that reveal the conflicts of existence women experienced. These binaries include, depending on the context of the spaces the window separates; private vs. public, culture vs. nature, safety vs. exposure, and imprisonment vs. freedom, each of which are, at least in *Wuthering Heights*, distinctly gendered.

The term 'painting' refers to both an action and an object, and I consider both to be significant when exploring the symbolic use of paintings in this study. In my third and final chapter, I look at Anne Brontë's, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, where I consider the central symbolic function of painting to be the dramatisation of the issue of representation. Painting aptly stands as a symbol for representation because as an object, it stages (re)presentation. However, this is never a straightforward process, and as these texts reveal, neither is the process of women's representation. If we consider the portrait, for instance, this is a form that aims to capture the likeness of its subject. However, in *The Portrait in Fiction of the Romantic Period*, Joe Bray reveals that the portrait's association with mimetic likeness was complicated in the late eighteenth century due to the influence of popular portrait artist Sir Joshua Reynolds. Reynolds advocated for the production of a pleasing effect in the portrait and for bringing out the better qualities the sitter possessed or aspired towards.<sup>23</sup> This reveals the inherent subjectivity involved in the act of artistic representation. Indeed, even when the painting under study is of a different form, such as landscape painting, an element of subjectivity is unavoidable in both the creation and the reception of the work of art. This was particularly emphasised in the mid-nineteenth century when the Brontës were writing as the most influential and popular art critic at the time, John Ruskin, was advocating for landscape paintings to reflect the perception and emotions of the artist.<sup>24</sup>

The contradictions inherent in the notion of re-presenting an image makes the act of painting an apt metaphor for exploring female representation which is itself so often contradictory. As my analysis of *Tenant* reveals, at a time when women's roles in society were governed by domestic ideology which considered it a woman's duty, "to spend her mental and moral capabilities in devising means for promoting the happiness of others", there is a notable conflict between patriarchal society's ideal representation of a woman and the representation put forth by the woman writer herself.<sup>25</sup> The act of painting, be it a portrait or a landscape painting, embodies this contradiction as it implies both

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<sup>23</sup> Joe Bray, *The Portrait in Fiction of the Romantic Period* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), p.10-11.

<sup>24</sup> Ruskin advocated for "reproduc[ing] the artist's impression of fact rather than the fact itself". John Ruskin, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, ed. by George P. Landow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.63.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The select works of Mrs. Ellis: comprising The Women of England, Wives of England, Daughters of England, Poetry of life, &c., designed to promote the cultivation of the domestic virtues* (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1843), p.15-16. [accessed online at hathitrust.org 12/11/19].



expressive freedom through creation and the following of certain codes and conventions dictated by the form that would assist in the achievement of an accurate representation.<sup>26</sup> There is thus a contradiction associated with painting that it invokes both creative freedom and constraint. This would have been particularly true for women artists at the time the Brontës were writing as they were excluded from the male realm of professional, expressive, and experimental High Art and were predominantly limited to roles as copyists.<sup>27</sup> As my third chapter reveals, Anne uses painting to explore the freedoms and constraints experienced by her protagonist who supports herself and her son financially through her art, but who is condemned by society for her untraditional role outside of the home. Moreover, I reveal that through this, Anne is also able to explore the freedoms and constraints she met with herself as a female author writing and representing female experience in the mid-nineteenth century.

It is important to emphasise that despite being distinct in many ways, mirrors, windows, and paintings work well together in a comparable study of this kind. This is because they each dramatise vision and 'ways of seeing', and they also each embody a certain level of contradiction which lends itself for the exploration of the complex nature of the Victorian female position. More simply, they can also be associated as comparable symbols by the qualities they share. For instance, the reflective quality of the mirror can be considered a function of windows and paintings also. This is evident with windows, which as I demonstrate in my analysis of *Wuthering Heights*, sometimes act as mirrors when opaque. We have also seen how paintings, particularly portraits, take on reflective qualities by reflecting both a likeness of the sitter and the subjective interpretation of the artist and viewer. Then, like windows, mirrors and paintings act as barriers or boundaries. This is because mirrors, windows, and paintings are all mediums through which we see, but which also act as a reminder of the limits of vision. Finally, in dramatizing vision, mirrors and windows can also stand, as paintings do, for the process and limitations of representation itself.

There is a final quality shared by these images that is necessary to acknowledge, and that is how they are symbolically or metaphorically associated with narrative. This is important to my thesis as my analysis of these images includes a consideration of their significance not just as symbols at plot level, but as keys to understanding the narrative expression of female representation. This has not yet been attempted before with these texts. For instance, in the first chapter I look at mirrors as symbols

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<sup>26</sup> Of course, not all artistic movements are concerned with representational accuracy, but Realism, the dominant artistic movement at the time the Brontës were writing, was. See Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> See Jan Marsh, 'Art, Ambition and Sisterhood in the 1850s', in Clarissa Campbell Orr ed., *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester & New York, Manchester University Press: 1995), pp.33-48.

for narrative mimesis and the doubling of genres employed in *Jane Eyre*. In the second chapter, I look at the window as a symbol for the ineffectuality of the frame narrative structure in *Wuthering Heights*. Finally, in my third chapter I consider the epistolary structure and narrative de-centralising of the female subject in *Tenants* as a direct response to issues of control over representation aroused by art. Considering how these symbols function on narrative level is important if we are to understand how they work in these texts in their varied and numerous ways.

Although this has not been attempted before with the work of the Brontës, I have been influenced by readings that have considered these images for their wider literary and narrative symbolisms. For instance, most will be familiar with the metaphor used to describe literature as providing a 'mirror' onto the world which conveys the idea that literature reflects or mimics reality. In, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, Meyer Howard Abrams applies this metaphor to describe literature before the Romantic period, from Plato to the eighteenth century, as offering merely a mimetic reflection of reality.<sup>28</sup> He then uses the metaphor of the lamp to depict the change dictated by Romantic theories of knowledge which emphasised the writer's role in illuminating how the reader sees the external world.<sup>29</sup> We see this influence reflected in the mid-nineteenth century in John Ruskin's suggestion that the work of art should "reproduce the artist's impression of fact rather than the fact itself".<sup>30</sup> Although I do not use Abrams' theory directly in my work, it should be noted for influencing the way I think about the mirror as more than just a physical symbol in *Jane Eyre*, but as a metaphor linked to narrative mimesis also.

Similarly to the mirror, another popular metaphor describes literature as providing a 'window' onto the world, although this reveals slightly different connotations. In his 1908 preface to *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), Henry James famously established the metaphor of 'the House of Fiction' in which the window symbolises the interest in the subjectivity of vision in art and literature in the nineteenth century. He describes fiction as a house punctured with "not one window, but a million", each of which is occupied by an individual artist-watcher who, looking out onto the world through their window, provides through their work a unique yet limited perspective on the world.<sup>31</sup> The window metaphor encompasses the nineteenth century's understanding of art and literature as providing subjective

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<sup>28</sup> Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).

<sup>29</sup> David Shaw has proposed a nineteenth-century equivalent to Abrams' metaphors by using the poet Alfred Tennyson's metaphor of a 'lucid veil' to describe nineteenth-century literature's interest in both the obscuring and revealing of truth through considerations of objective and subjective perspectives. See David Shaw, *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> Ruskin, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, p.63.

<sup>31</sup> Henry James, 'Preface to *Portrait of a Lady*', in R. P. Blackhur ed. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces of Henry James* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1934), pp.40-58 (p.43).

truths, as if seeing through a glass, darkly. Again, although I do not reference James' preface directly, this concept of the window as a metaphor for literature's subjective vision influenced my understanding of the way windows work to signal and criticise subjective perspectives in the frame narrative of *Wuthering Heights*.

There is no comparable metaphor for literature as providing a 'painting' onto the world as there is for the mirror and window, and this is because there is a clarity and accuracy of vision associated with the former two which is not associated with art, (although an often misguided one, as the third chapter of this thesis will reveal). This is because art is more sympathetically understood for its lack of objectivity. Indeed, as I have already touched upon, this was particularly true in the nineteenth century when key figures like John Ruskin championed the subjective input of the artist on the work of art. However, that is not to say that art has not been associated with literature or narrative. Historically, painting and the visual arts have held a far more direct and intimate relationship with literature due to their association as 'sister arts'. It has been widely noted that in the nineteenth century, literature and art "shared a powerful commitment to realism".<sup>32</sup> As a result of their shared aims, the language of art was used to describe literature, and vice versa. For instance, Kate Flint notes the mid-Victorian tendency for describing and valuing paintings in terms of the 'narratives' they depicted, whilst numerous critics have shown how visual metaphors and the language of painting infiltrated literature as the realist movement was itself grounded in painting.<sup>33</sup> Of course, the sister arts also worked combatively within a hierarchy, and as a result it became common for authors to draw upon the visual arts in their novels to criticise the form and to explore anxieties of misrepresentation.<sup>34</sup> As I address in the third chapter of this thesis, Anne Brontë employs art in this way in *Tenant* where painting is linked to gossip to reveal women's lack of control over their representation and literature is privileged as a mode of representation associated with authority and influence.

If there is one final point to reinforce before moving on to address the wider reading that informed this thesis, it is that mirrors, windows, and paintings are symbols drawn upon by these

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<sup>32</sup> Dehn Gilmore, *The Victorian Novel and the Space of Art* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.1.

<sup>33</sup> Kate Flint, *The Victorians and Visual Imagination* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000)., Mack Smith, *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> See Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.50., Barbara Onslow has also addressed how women writers in particular would implement portraits in their writing to "expose and implicitly question the male creation of women's role" as it has been traditionally depicted through art. Barbara Onslow, 'Deceiving Images, Revealing Images: The Portrait in Victorian Women's Writing', *Victorian Poetry*, 33:3-4 (1995), pp.450-75 (p.462).

authors for the purpose of exploring issues of female identity and its representations not only because they offer apt symbolism for considering ‘ways of seeing’, but because they symbolise the inherent dualisms of female experience and its representations also. Indeed, as this thesis will reveal, through the employment and exploration of mirrors, windows, and paintings, the Brontës create expansive symbolic spaces through which they criticise existing depictions of women and explore new ways of navigating through, and at times out of, their traditional positions in society. However, at the same time, these images also invoke barriers and restrictions. They are not boundless or limitless symbols for vision or for imagination, rather, they frame certain perspectives and limit how far one can look. This element of restriction, of pushing back against the opportunity for vision and revision, reflects a crucial tension that we will meet with in each of the text’s here discussed. As we will see, at the same time as they push the boundaries of female representation, the Brontës and their protagonists encounter the legitimate limitations of self-expression and self-creation achievable for women in nineteenth century patriarchal society.

As I have revealed, mirrors, windows, and paintings provide useful metaphors for exploring issues of representation in art and literature because like art and literature, they are concerned with and can be seen to dramatise ways of seeing or (re)presenting the world. Furthermore, they do not stand for one kind of vision, but as images that dramatise vision they can be drawn upon again and again to reveal culturally specific attitudes towards representation. This thesis is informed by the many studies and theories that have been produced on the relationship between vision and identity, particularly those that have looked specifically at nineteenth-century contexts of vision. Indeed, the nineteenth century has been described as “the era of the visual”, “what Baudelaire dubbed ‘le culte des images’”.<sup>35</sup> This is due to the many and varied advancements in technologies of vision which have been well documented by critics on Victorian visual culture. Alexandra Wettlaufer provides a concise account of these developments that highlights their diversity. She writes,

In this age of exposition, the French and British publics negotiated their knowledge of the world through panoramas, spectacles, galleries, museums, magic lanterns, stereoscopes, and displays large and small that came to shape ways of conceptualizing self and other as well as physical universe. This ‘frenzy of the visible,’ to borrow Jean-Louis Comolli’s redolent phrase, was further stoked by the proliferation of illustrated books and journals, exhibitions, photographs, prints, reproductions, and paintings, all of which were circulated, reproduced, and/or displayed for unprecedented numbers of visual consumers [...] If the period from the

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<sup>35</sup> Alexandra Wettlaufer, *Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Painting and the Novel in France and Britain, 1800–1860* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011), p.10.

French Revolution through the reign of Victoria was dominated by acts and metaphors of active seeing, it was equally a period of 'being seen.' From Balzac and Dickens to Foucault, the social imaginary was haunted by the specter of the 'unseen seer' gazing upon the unconscious citizenry in an anxiety-inducing iteration of panopticism. As Walter Benjamin affirmed, this was a century dominated by 'the activity of the eye'.<sup>36</sup>

Wettlaufer demonstrates just how all-encompassing the visual revolution of the nineteenth century was, seemingly impacting every area of Victorian life from the social to the scientific. However, as this list reveals, the visual revolution did not necessarily signal a time for unifying concepts of vision, but rather, it was a time that highlighted visual tensions.<sup>37</sup>

One key tension which Wettlaufer highlights is that new ways of seeing also forced Victorian society to consider new circumstances of being seen. In *Victorian Glassworlds*, Isobel Armstrong refers to this period as "the era of public glass".<sup>38</sup> Her study provides a detailed history of advancements in glass production alongside a poetics of glass culture. This has been influential in forming my contextual understanding of glass as a natural material with traces of human production, (which I consider when looking at window smashing as a form of protest in *Shirley*), as opposed to a material associated with "traceless purity" as it became in early modernism.<sup>39</sup> Armstrong is also amongst critics who note that the increased use of glass in public spaces resulted in anxieties over uncontrollable reflection that specifically targeted women. As my study is concerned with gender and considers two glass symbols for vision, I have found the surprising wealth of studies that look at how new glass technologies disrupted traditional male-subject, female-object hierarchies of looking at this time to be particularly informative. As studies like Andrew Miller's, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative*, and Krista Lysack's, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* highlight, new glass-replete public spaces, epitomised by the department store, the Crystal Palace, and the Parisian arcades, frequently placed women at the centre of anxieties as they were seen as both objects for consumption and potentially dangerous consuming subjects

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<sup>36</sup> Wettlaufer, *Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p.10.

<sup>37</sup> On the one hand this was a time when seeing was linked to knowing. In the sciences, technologies like the microscope and telescope attempted empirical certainty through aided vision, and the popular emergence of physiognomy and phrenology claimed that the body could be studied by the trained eye and read for signs of psychological ailments. (For a comprehensive look at phrenology and physiognomy at the time see Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1998)). On the other hand, the new ways of seeing that occurred through glass technologies, although providing exciting advancements in ways of seeing, simultaneously highlighted the limitations and subjectivities of the naked human eye. (See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (London: MIT Press, 1992)).

<sup>38</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.1.,

<sup>39</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.151.

themselves.<sup>40</sup> In my first chapter I argue that this is an anxiety visible in *Villette*. However, I move beyond existing studies which focus on the scopic tension of shop windows and instead reveal how Brontë explores anxieties of women's objectification through the mirror.

As I consider gender identity from a feminist perspective, I am particularly influenced by studies that address the way vision is used to create and reinforce hierarchies of power. John Berger's, *Ways of Seeing*, and Laura Mulvey's, 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema', provided an initial introduction to the power hierarchies of vision within patriarchal societies that, at least traditionally, privilege men as agents of the gaze and women as objects of it.<sup>41</sup> That women have been reduced to a role as object in the traditional scopic relationship has impacted their ability to see themselves as subjects, as La Belle's study has revealed. Although in my own analysis I disagree with her reading of the role of the mirror in *Jane Eyre*, La Belle's study has been particularly influential for providing a historical understanding of how women have attempted to reclaim their relationship with the self through the mirror. Although anxieties concerning women's enforced role as object of the gaze abound in the work of the Brontë sisters, Beth Newman's, *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity*, has been influential for acknowledging how subjectivity also occurs in being seen.<sup>42</sup> She credits Michel Foucault's theory of the panoptic gaze in *Discipline and Punish* for drawing attention to the way being the object of the look influenced the construction of subjectivity in the nineteenth century, and this has informed my own consideration of the effects of social surveillance in public and private spaces in *Villette* and *Shirley*.<sup>43</sup>

As I have outlined, the five novels I examine in this thesis, *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853), I read as novels that address contemporaneous issues of the female position and its representations through the symbolism of mirrors, windows, and paintings.<sup>44</sup> When I speak of 'issues of the female position', I am

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)., Krista Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008). See also, Elizabeth Carlson, 'Dazzling and Deceiving: Reflections in the Nineteenth-Century Department Store', *Visual Resources*, 28:2 (2012), pp.117-137. For a study that considers the power women had in public spaces, allowing them to adopt desiring gazes and to exercise their purchasing power, see Lynda Nead, 'Mapping the Self: Gender, Space, and Modernity in Mid-Victorian London', *Environment and Planning*, 29:4 (1997), pp.659-672.

<sup>41</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1973)., Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), pp.6-18.

<sup>42</sup> Beth Newman, *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity* (Ohio: Ohio University press, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> I have chosen not to focus on the Brontës' poetry or juvenilia as not only does looking solely at their novels allow for consistency when considering the narrative significance of these symbols, but as I am interested in exploring issues of female identity, by considering their most mature work, this reveals their most developed

referring to these novels as responding to the dominant gender ideology of the time, domestic femininity, as embodied by the figure of the 'Angel in the House'. To understand the expectations of women under domestic ideology, I have found John Ruskin's much quoted *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) to be of particular importance, as well as the various nineteenth-century domestic conduct literatures written by women writers such as Sarah Stickney Ellis and Isabella Beeton.<sup>45</sup> Some earlier critics considered the positive effect of women's role in the home for allowing them a power over a sphere of their own. For example, Judith Lowder Newton, Nancy Armstrong, and Monica Cohen have produced pivotal texts that in various ways argue that women cultivated an alternative power to men through their covert influence in the home.<sup>46</sup> However, others like Mary Poovey and Helene Michie have focused on the oppressive limitations of this gender ideology by giving focus to the impossible contradictions in expectations of women's roles.<sup>47</sup> I find an understanding of the ways the female domestic position was considered as both empowering and oppressive to be important when approaching the work of the Brontës as they each demonstrate their own unique struggle between rebellion and conformity when it comes to exploring gender ideology and the female domestic position in their novels.

As I have now outlined the wider contextual reading that has informed this study and my approach, I will turn to address the limits to which mirrors, windows, and paintings have been addressed in existing studies and provide a breakdown of my chapters which reveals how I move

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takes on such topics. This also justifies why I have chosen not to consider Charlotte's, *The Professor* (1857), or Anne's, *Agnes Grey* (1847). Both novels have been seen to propose concepts that were then further developed in *Villette* and *Tenant* respectively, and thus their omission felt acceptable due to limitations of space. For *Villette* as extending the ideas put forth in *The Professor*, see Sarah Gilead, 'Liminality and Antiliminality in Charlotte Brontë's Novels: Shirley Reads *Jane Eyre*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 29:3 (1987), pp.202-221. For *Tenant* as extending the ideas put forth in *Agnes Grey*, see Arlene M. Jackson, 'The Question of Credibility in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *English Studies*, 63:3 (1982), pp.198-206., Christine Colón, 'Enacting the Art of Moral Influence: Religion and Social Reform in the Works of Anne Brontë', *Women's Writing*, 11:3 (2004), pp.399-420.

<sup>45</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies: Three Lectures* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1879)., Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Select Works of Mrs. Ellis: Comprising The Women of England, Wives of England, Daughters of England, Poetry of life, &c.*, (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1843)., Isabella Beeton, *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2006)., Frances Power Cobbe, *The Duties of Women: A Course of Lectures* (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication, 1887).

<sup>46</sup> Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860* (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 1981)., Nancy Armstrong, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995)., Monica Cohen, *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work and Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> Mary Poovey looks at how gender difference and its contradictions arose through literary, moral, and medical discourses at the time. See Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Helene Michie critiques the contradiction of the absence of women's bodies in Victorian literature which was nonetheless seemingly obsessed with the female 'figure'. See Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

beyond these ideas. Considering the current critical interest in material culture studies and 'thing theory', it is surprising a detailed study of this kind, or at least a re-assessment of the limits of existing studies, has not yet already been attempted. In *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, Elaine Freedgood reads the hidden history of colonialism in the mahogany furniture in *Jane Eyre*, and in *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects*, Deborah Lutz takes a biographical approach to the Brontës' personal objects, reading their relationship to the moors through Branwell's walking stick, for example.<sup>48</sup> But that windows, mirrors and paintings are rarely looked at in studies of this kind is perhaps due to the fact that they are not all or always strictly 'objects'. They often work as spaces, for instance, and it would be more difficult to imagine the window featuring in a study of material culture than it would a regular commodity, like a walking stick. Moreover, as they function as symbols for vision, we often look through these object-spaces and not at them. This is particularly true of mirrors and windows whose main functions are to provide visual access to something other than the objects themselves.

Whilst this may account for why windows, mirrors, and paintings get overlooked in object studies, it does not account for the lack of development or reassessment in existing ones. However, there has been the suggestion that as common or abundant literary symbols, mirrors, windows, and paintings are self-evident or 'obvious' in their meaning and thus not in need of sustained examination. This attitude is aptly summarised by Margaret Homans, who when putting forth a reading of the inside-nurture, outside-nature binary in *Wuthering Heights* which remains popular to this day, stated that:

The reader becomes accustomed to Brontë's habitual use of the image of the house, with its windows and doors variously locked or open, as a figure for varying psychic conditions [...] To review this pattern quickly, the closed house generally represents some sort of entrapment.<sup>49</sup>

For Homans, the symbolism of the house and its windows and doors is 'habitual' enough that the reader is assumedly 'accustomed' to their use and, as she suggests by her vague interpretations of their standing for 'varying psychic conditions' and 'some sort of entrapment', accustomed to their meaning also. Homans is not necessarily incorrect in her reading; she is clearly referring to the symbolism of the house and its features as it has been used historically in Gothic literature. However,

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<sup>48</sup> Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2006)., Deborah Lutz, *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Homans, 'Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*', *PMLA*, 93:1 (1978), pp.9-19 (p.11).



by suggesting that they serve the same general function, she overlooks the potential for the nuancing or even subversion of seemingly commonplace literary symbols such as the window.

In a similar vein, another reason why windows, mirrors, and paintings have not received fresh consideration is due to a feeling that they have received sufficient critical analysis. Dorothy Van Ghent's, 'The Window Figure and the Two-Children Figure in *Wuthering Heights*', is still considered the most wide-ranging study on the function of windows in Emily's novel. Although her reading of the window as a boundary "separating the 'inside' from the 'outside', the 'human' from the alien and terrible 'other'" has been widely influential, her focus, and the focus of those who follow her, tends to be on the inside and outside spaces the window separates, rather than on the window itself.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's reading of the female double in *The Madwoman in the Attic* has provided a template for anyone considering the role of the mirror in *Jane Eyre* since its publication.<sup>51</sup> But again, despite its influence, whilst the mirror in which the double appears is briefly mentioned in their analysis, they give no consideration to its role outside of reflection, leaving the wider implication of narrative mirroring in the text uncovered.

As the sheer volume of Brontë criticism and its developments over the last century and a half has resulted in it achieving canonical status in its own right, an important part of this study involves positioning my readings within existing criticisms, and showing how certain seminal ideas can be advanced whilst addressing the limitations of others. This has also helped inform the structure of this thesis. I consider these symbols in individual chapters and in relation to the novel or novels they are most significant to in terms of both physical and narrative symbolism. For instance, I consider mirrors in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, windows in *Wuthering Heights* and *Shirley*, and art in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. By structuring my thesis in this way, I give these symbols a thorough analysis where they are most relevant within the scope of this study. I therefore also address these symbols within the texts that they have been most often considered in existing studies, except in the case of *Jane Eyre* in which the role of art and painting has been most commonly considered.<sup>52</sup> This is a natural result of looking at these symbols in the texts in which they feature most frequently, but it also allows for me to engage

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<sup>50</sup> Dorothy Van Ghent, 'The Window Figure and the Two-Children Figure in *Wuthering Heights*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 7:3 (1952), pp.189-197 (p.191).

<sup>51</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984).

<sup>52</sup> For more studies on the role of art in *Jane Eyre*, see Jane Sellars, 'Art and the Artist as Heroine in the Novels of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 20:2 (1990), pp.57-76., James R. Simmons, 'Jane Eyre's Symbolic Paintings', *Brontë Studies*, 27:3 (2002), pp.247-249., Kathleen A. Miller, "Well that is beautiful, Miss Jane!': *Jane Eyre* and the Creation of the Female Artist', *Brontë studies*, 35:3 (2010), pp.248-266., Maria Ioannou, "A brilliancy of their own!': Female Art, Beauty and Sexuality in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*', *Brontë studies*, 43:4 (2018), pp.323-334.

with and move beyond the limitations of existing studies. Furthermore, by acknowledging that each symbol is more important to some texts than to others, we are reminded that although the Brontës provide a useful combined body of work that documents women's writing and its concerns from a certain period, they were nonetheless distinct writers with varied opinions and approaches to tackling the comparable issues their texts explore.

I will begin with *Jane Eyre*, which I read in comparison to *Villette* in my first chapter on the mirror. As previously mentioned, Jane's role as an artist has been well documented both in terms of the paintings she produces and how she can be considered as a visual narrator. However, no one has attempted a similar consideration of the symbolic and narrative function of the mirror which is far more revealing of what Jane achieves as a female autobiographer narrating and retrospectively re-creating her own life story. As I have outlined, Gilbert and Gubar popularised a feminist reading of Bertha Mason as Jane's "truest and darkest double", a reading that has influenced my own.<sup>53</sup> However, they only vaguely refer to the mirror, and as a result, criticisms ever since have overlooked its role. Not only do I consider the mirror as it appears elsewhere in the text, a role which has been previously ignored, I use the Foucauldian concept of the mirror as a heterotopian space alongside a Jungian reading of Jane's double as the 'shadow side' of her personality to fully explicate the mirror's spatial and psychological functions.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, I move beyond the limits of existing readings by considering the mirror's narrative functions also. Elsewhere in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar provide a reading of the patriarchal function of the mirror in *Snow White* that would have been usefully applied to their reading of *Jane Eyre*. However, they fail to consider how the novel's fairy tale narrative references relate to the employment of the mirror. As I read *Jane Eyre* as creating a narrative mimesis between realism, fairy tales and the Gothic, I draw upon research by critics who have looked at the central function of the mirror as a patriarchal tool in fairy tale narratives.<sup>55</sup> This allows me to reveal how in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë subverts both the patriarchal function of the mirror and the reader's expectations of traditional Gothic and fairy tale plots, ultimately using the mirror and its narrative symbolism to centre Jane in a position of individual and textual autonomy.

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<sup>53</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.360.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), pp.22-27., C. J. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, in *The Collected Works*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull, ed. by Sir Herbert Read (London & New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Christina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997)., Veronica L. Schanoes, *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory: Feminism and Retelling the Tale* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014)., Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

Similarly to *Jane Eyre*, the role of art has been widely considered in *Villette*.<sup>56</sup> However, the mirror has not received the same critical attention, despite being employed to explore similar anxieties of female representation and, more specifically, objectification. In the second part of my first chapter, I argue that there is a visible development between *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* that reveals Brontë's changed approach to the issue of female representation. I demonstrate that this is revealed in her changed implementation of the mirror across the two novels. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* is a novel that challenges the limits of the mirror as a tool restricted to revealing only a surface-level representation of identity. Furthermore, due to the way it deals with public life, whereas *Jane Eyre* deals more exclusively with the domestic, *Villette* is also a more outward-looking novel that is concerned with women's wider representation in society, including positions outside of marriage. Indeed, *Villette* has rightly been considered as Brontë's reaction to mid-century developments in commodity culture and, more specifically, her reaction to The Great Exhibition of 1851 which she visited five times.<sup>57</sup> I see a study of the mirror in this novel existing amongst those that have considered the role of commodity culture in the text as through the mirror, Brontë explores the varied objectification and commodification of women in patriarchal society.<sup>58</sup> I argue that Brontë responds to this by looking for new ways to represent her protagonist that avoids emphasizing her physicality through mirror centralisation. Lucy's first-person narration has long been considered as elusive and misleading.<sup>59</sup> However, I demonstrate that her narrative technique is revealing of a sophisticated psychological intimacy that directly shapes the reader's experience of the text. Ultimately, I reveal that whereas in *Jane Eyre* a centralized position in the narrative and in the mirror is key to the claiming of female autonomy, in *Villette*, Lucy Snowe's seemingly de-centred narrative position is a reflection of her rejection of the mirror and an example of Brontë's attempt at putting forth an alternative method of female narrative representation.

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Paul Wotipka, 'Ocularity and Irony: Pictorialism in *Villette*', *Word and Image*, 8:2 (1992), pp.100-108., Jill L. Matus 'Looking At Cleopatra: The Expression and Exhibition of Desire in *Villette*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26 (1998), pp.345-367., Emily Petermann, "'These are not a whit like nature': Lucy Snowe's Art Criticism in *Villette*', *Brontë Studies*, 36:3 (2011), p.277-288.

<sup>57</sup> Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>58</sup> Other studies that address the role of commodity culture in *Villette* include Eva Badowska, 'Choseville: Brontë's *Villette* and the Art of Bourgeois Interiority', *PMLA*, 120:5 (2005), pp.1509-1523., Kathryn Crowther, 'Charlotte Brontë's Textual Relics: Memorializing the Material in *Villette*', *Brontë Studies*, 35:2 (2010), pp.128-136., Aviva Briefel, "'Freaks of Furniture": The Useless Energy of Haunted Things', *Victorian Studies*, 59:2 (2017), pp.209-234.

<sup>59</sup> Heather Glen has perhaps been most critical, stating that, "throughout *Villette* she is presented as a 'mere spectator', rather than a shaping observer", and referring to Lucy as, "less shaping subject than helpless object". See Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University press, 2002), pp.223,235. See also, Mary Jacobus, *Women Writing and Writing About Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979)., Christina Crosby, 'Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 24:4 (1984), pp.701-715., Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Since Van Ghent's original study that looked at the window as dividing binaries of inside and outside, 'Self' and 'Other' in *Wuthering Heights*, it has been common for criticism to look through the windows that proliferate the text and address the spaces, real and metaphorical, that they separate. Some alternative readings have been attempted. For instance, David Sonstroem has interpreted the window as a symbol for the multiple perspectives the novel poses but that do not lead to any sense clarity: "[F]or all the windows and books in the novel, no one sees very far or learns very much".<sup>60</sup> Then, Elizabeth Napier suggests that all boundaries in *Wuthering Heights* are ineffectual because unstable boundaries "dramatize the difficulty of self-definition and choice in a world without difference".<sup>61</sup> There are elements of truth to both readings. For instance, windows do dramatize the difficulty of self-definition in this text, particularly for women. However, self-definition is not difficult because *Wuthering Heights* presents a 'world without difference'. As my analysis reveals, the point Brontë makes is that society is built on unjust gender differences that disproportionately limit and oppress women. Furthermore, the window is employed to explore the limits of vision, but it does not stand for the multiple vision of all characters in the novel. Rather, as I reveal, the window is aligned with the perspective of the male frame narrator and is haunted by the ghost of Catherine Earnshaw as an expression of female rebellion against patriarchal authority.

Indeed, where studies of the window in this novel have failed is in overlooking its crucial association with the figure of the female ghost. My understanding of the female ghost as a disruptive figure, one who collapses boundaries and distinctions through her form and who stands for both female oppression and rebellion, has been informed by Esther Peeren and Vanessa Dickerson's excellent studies.<sup>62</sup> However, I move beyond their readings by considering how the dual quality of imprisonment and revolt the ghost embodies is emphasised through its alignment with the window in Brontë's novel. As with the first chapter, I reveal that the window acts as both a physical symbol and a metaphor for narrative. I first consider narrative, arguing that Brontë associates the framed visual image of the window and its role in dictating what visually and physically 'gets in' with the role of the male frame narrator. I then look at instances where the female ghost disrupts the ordering and legitimising role of the narrator, undermining his attempts at establishing a linear narrative and explicating meaning for the reader. I consider this as a rebellion against the imprisoning role of the house and the male authored narrative as symbolised by the window. Finally, I address the effect of

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<sup>60</sup> David Sonstroem, 'Wuthering Heights and the Limits of Vision', *PMLA*, 86:1 (1971), pp.51-62 (p.54).

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Napier, 'The Problem of Boundaries in *Wuthering Heights*', *Philological Quarterly*, 63 (1984), pp.95-107 (p.106).

<sup>62</sup> Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Vanessa D. Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1996).

the female ghost on disordering patriarchal authority at plot level. I do this by showing that the ghost Catherine's haunting presence, which is seemingly everywhere and nowhere, leads Heathcliff on a search for reunion that is revealed to be futile, ultimately mimicking the reader's own futile search for conclusion and escape from the oppressive repetition of the text.

As I address in the chapter itself, I have been greatly influenced by J. Hillis Miller's reading of Catherine's role in the text, later adopted by Stevie Davies, that she represents "the magnetic human centre of *Wuthering Height*", but a centre that is misleading in what it appears to offer.<sup>63</sup> Miller was the first to note the way in which the reader is led "deeper and deeper into the text" in search of its implied meaning, only to find themselves on the "periphery" of understanding, "at the blind center of vision, where sight fails".<sup>64</sup> This movement from centre to periphery is a pattern I also recognise in the novel. However, I move beyond Miller's reading in two crucial ways. First, Miller refers to the narrative pattern in terms of a movement from the 'centre' of implied meaning to a vague 'periphery'. However, I show that this periphery is in fact a locatable space: the window. I then further complicate his reading by showing that ultimately, distinctions between centre and periphery collapse through the window's association with the ghost. Second, Miller fails to consider the significance of the gendering of the ghost. His post-structuralist reading overlooks the key function of the female ghost in not just disrupting narrative, but in disrupting narrative as it stands for the dominant and oppressive patriarchal ideologies the text criticises. Leading Gothic scholar Roger Luckhurst has warned against contemporary uses of haunting or spectrality as theoretical tools by arguing that, "the generalized structure of haunting is symptomatically blind to its generative loci".<sup>65</sup> However, by reading the role of haunting as specifically gendered and reflective of Brontë's frustrations towards the Victorian woman's social and domestic position, I provide a necessary historical interpretation of the role of haunting in the novel.

The second section of this chapter on windows looks at their role in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*. I am particularly interested in how windows function in this novel as Charlotte draws upon the same iconography of the woman at the window as Emily does, imbuing that image with similar Gothic connotations. However, I argue that she is ultimately critical of this representation where Emily is sympathetic. I demonstrate how Charlotte draws upon this image as part of her novel's wider commentary on genre as it relates to gender representation. Indeed, there has been a disjunction

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<sup>63</sup> Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), p.187.

<sup>64</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.60,68.

<sup>65</sup> Roger Luckhurst, 'The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the 'Spectral Turn'', *Textual Practice*, 16:3 (2002), pp.527-546 (p.528).

noted in *Shirley* since its publication which most have considered in terms of gender, seeing the novel as presenting a tension between the seemingly disparate male, 'condition of England', and female, 'woman question', issues circulating at the time.<sup>66</sup> Fewer critics have noted how the novel's multiple narrative influences have contributed to this sense of disjunction.<sup>67</sup> However, I demonstrate that the two issues, gender and genre, are linked in this text. I do this by showing how Brontë associates women with romance narratives to emphasise how they are trapped in male-imagined roles that limit their position to the home and deny them access to a meaningful role in society through work. My analysis is delivered in two parts. First, I consider how windows are associated with women through the typical iconographic imagery of the woman at the window and as spaces that highlight women's desire for freedom whilst reinforcing their confinement within the home. Then, I compare this to the association between windows and the working-class men of the novel's 'condition of England' or Luddite rebellion plot. Here windows are used as sites of protest as the out of work men revolt against their position. Ultimately, I reveal that Brontë demonstrates how both groups, working-class men and middle-class women, suffer due to their reliance upon the patriarchal ruling class to dictate their position in society. However, I show that through the window, Brontë reveals the differences afforded to men and women in their abilities to rebel against their positions, resolving that whereas men have opportunity for action, women must conform if they are to obtain a level of power in patriarchal society.

My analysis of mirrors and windows demonstrates their centrality as key symbols in their corresponding texts. With paintings, I de-centralise their significance in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. This is not to suggest that the symbolism of paintings is not important to the novel, but rather that it has been overemphasised and misunderstood for its role. As a result, other significant modes of representation that work alongside art to comment on the difficulties of female representation have been overlooked. Popular readings of *Tenant* give too great and too celebratory a status to the role of art in the novel. Most notably, there is a tendency in feminist criticism to consider the novel as a *Künstlerroman*, a growth of the artist narrative, and to read Helen as an example of the emerging figure of the professional woman artist in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>68</sup> However, through my

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<sup>66</sup> Key readings include, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984)., Anna Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004)., Peter J. Capuano, 'Networked Manufacture in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Victorian Studies*, 55:2 (2013), pp.231-242.

<sup>67</sup> See Gisela Argyle, 'Gender and Generic Mixing in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 35:4 (1995), pp.741-756., Tara Moore, 'Women and Myth Narratives in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Women's Writing*, 11:3 (2004), pp.477-492.

<sup>68</sup> Key criticisms include, Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1979)., Roberta

analysis, not only do I reveal that Helen is not a professional painter, I also reveal that it is the written word and not art that is the privileged mode of representation in the text. Indeed, I read Brontë's novel as being concerned not with the figure of the professional woman artist, but with the figure of the working woman more generally. Her occupation as a painter, I argue, is drawn upon for the opportunities painting allows for symbolically exploring the issues and contradictions that arise when a woman attempts to create a position for herself outside the status quo.

I approach this chapter in parts, considering art, gossip, and the written word as the three main modes of representation that Brontë employs to explore the depiction and reception of her untraditional female protagonist, who is both a working woman and single mother. I first reassess the role of art in the novel and reveal that it is employed as a mode of representation used to explore the misrepresentation of women in patriarchal society. My reading of art as a criticised rather than celebrated mode requires an understanding of Helen's position as not a creative professional artist, but a pragmatic commercial painter. I provide a close reading of her paintings and painting practice to demonstrate the commercial rather than intellectual intensions of her production. I then show how her artistic production is associated with economic necessity rather than artistic ambition. I argue that these are important distinctions to make as although Brontë was subversive in her representation of Helen Graham, who is an untraditional example of a Victorian woman in many ways, she was also careful to keep her within the bounds of respectable femininity to ensure Helen's sympathetic, rather than critical, reception. I compare my reading of Helen as a working commercial artist to a popular painting by Emily Mary Osborn, *Nameless and Friendless* (1857), which also depicts a sympathetic image of a working female artist at a similar time. By comparing these representations, I am able to reveal that there was a notable tension in the work of women writers and artists in the mid-nineteenth century between their desire to subvert typical representations of women whilst also ensuring their depictions were congenial to their audiences.

After exploring how art signals fear over misrepresentation in *Tenant*, I address how gossip reveals anxieties concerning control over representation more generally. I demonstrate how gossip works in the text to highlight the way female reputation is controlled and dictated by patriarchal society by looking at the gendering of gossip and how it targets women as 'objects' in a similar way to

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White, *A Studio of One's Own: Fictional Women Painters and the Art of Fiction* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005)., Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848–1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006)., Antonia Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), & 'The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 58:1 (2003), pp.1-41.

the patriarchal gaze.<sup>69</sup> I also reveal how gossip furthers the suggestion, first made through Helen's objectification as a working artist, that she is in some way sexually promiscuous due to her proximity to improper or unfeminine 'exchange'.<sup>70</sup> I reveal how gossip further implicates Helen in suggestions of sexual deviancy by placing her as an object of exchange in community discourse. Despite their clear differences, I ultimately reveal that art and gossip work in surprisingly similar ways in this text as they both demonstrate ways in which women struggle to control their reputations and representations in patriarchal societies. The final section of this chapter argues that the written word, namely Helen's diary and letters, provides a space through which control over representation can be achieved. I reveal how Helen's diary is used as a legitimate and trustworthy source that clears her name in society by revealing her true character. Most significantly, I also reveal that the written word takes on an even more celebratory role in the text as it acts as a kind of conduct literature, providing an educational and reformatory tool for other characters in the narrative. This offers a prime example of the way the Brontës as writers were forced to mediate between rebellion and conformity when it came to female representation as although Helen does achieve control over self and narrative by the end of the text, she achieves this by adopting a traditional role that undermines her original subversive potential.

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<sup>69</sup> My understanding of the gendering of gossip was influenced by Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1985).

<sup>70</sup> My understanding of the association between working women and sexual deviancy, namely prostitution, was influenced by Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).



# CHAPTER 1

## MIRRORS AND MIMESIS IN *JANE EYRE*

In his study on the cultural significance of mirrors, Mark Pendergrast states that, “[M]irrors are meaningless until someone looks into them. Thus, a history of the mirror is really the history of looking, and what we perceive in these magical surfaces will tell us a great deal about ourselves”.<sup>1</sup> Pendergrast highlights a common assumption that mirror-looking provides its subject with an intimate experience of self-exploration and self-discovery. However, as we considered in the introduction, women in particular are rarely alone when they look into the glass. For instance, Jenijoy La Belle’s, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass*, reveals how mirrors have been used by women writers to express the division they experience perceiving themselves as both autonomous subjects and cultural objects.<sup>2</sup> The mirror dramatises this tension as it requires the woman gazer to adopt both the position of looker and object of the look, experiencing herself as subject and object simultaneously. However, even the experience of directing the gaze as a subject is complicated for women due to the fact that in Western societies, “it is preeminently men (as subjects) who observe women (as objects)”.<sup>3</sup> Thus when a woman looks at herself in the mirror, the patriarchal gaze of society that positions her as its object is present in how she perceives herself. Mirror gazing is therefore not as straightforwardly intimate as we might assume.

Despite these conflicts, La Belle’s study also demonstrates how rather than “throwing away the mirror”, many women writers and artists have made it into “a more flexible tool” as, “[F]or women to liberate themselves as women is not to dismiss their bodies but to free them from male/mirror tyranny”.<sup>4</sup> She considers the Brontë sisters as some of the earliest women writers to “see that the mirror is intimately connected with self-retaliation and self-creation”, and her reading of *Jane Eyre* concludes that, “[W]ith the Brontës [...] a woman’s heroism is dependent on a rejection of the mirror”.<sup>5</sup> However, as this chapter will reveal, the rejection of the mirror as a necessary step towards autonomous selfhood is a more appropriate description of Charlotte Brontë’s final novel, *Villette*. In *Jane Eyre*, however, it is specifically male-derived images of femininity and the ‘male/mirror tyranny’

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Pendergrast, *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Jenijoy La Belle, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> La Belle, *Herself Beheld*, p.53., Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), pp.6-18 (p.11).

<sup>4</sup> La Belle, *Herself Beheld*, p.180.

<sup>5</sup> La Belle, *Herself Beheld*, p.72,174.

from which the protagonist seeks to escape. Mirrors more generally, as I will demonstrate, are employed in the narrative as a tool for reclaiming the female relationship with the self.

The first and perhaps most popular mirror scene in *Jane Eyre* occurs near the beginning of the novel, after Jane is called by her cousin from her respite in the window seat at Gateshead Hall and is banished by her aunt to the sinister red room. Perhaps encouraged by its claustrophobic nature, this scene is commonly considered in isolation to its surrounding context. However, the window that provides the visual focus in the novel's opening, as we saw in the introduction, creates a sense of imaginative and visual freedom that provides an important juxtaposition to the oppressive psychospatial environment subsequently created in the red room. Furthermore, John Reed's demand that Jane come forth from the window seat and, "stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows" (6), foreshadows an important textual concept that there is a unique relationship or affinity between woman and the glass and a power in Jane's propensity for vision that threatens male authority.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, in the following red room scene the reader witnesses the first suggestion that mirrors may be used as a powerful tool for the development of female subjectivity in *Jane Eyre*.

Upon entering the red room, Jane describes a space of deep interiority that lends itself to physical and psychological interpretation:

It was one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre [...] the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth [...] Scarcely less prominent was an ample cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it; and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne (11).

Although Gilbert and Gubar established a popular reading of the red room as a "patriarchal death chamber" reflective of Jane's position in "the society in which she is trapped", the blood-like redness of the room and the fleshy textures implied by the damask curtains, carpets and cloths evokes a clear womb-like quality, or as Elaine Showalter and Claire Kahane suggest, implies "strong associations with the adult female body", "the [Gothic] heroine is imprisoned not in a house but in the female body".<sup>7</sup> Reading the red room as a space of female corporeal and psychological intimacy rather than one of

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<sup>6</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. by Jane Jack & Margaret Smith (Oxford & London: Oxford University Press; The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of the Brontës: 1975). All subsequent references to the text will be taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited parenthetically.

<sup>7</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.340., Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978), p.115., Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror', in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, ed. by S. Garner, C. Kahane, and M. Sprengnether (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 334-351 (p.343).

patriarchal oppression is necessary to understanding the crisis of identity depicted in Jane's climactic experience with the mirror.

Continuing to explore the red room, Jane describes,

The bed rose before me; to my right hand there was the high, dark wardrobe, with subdued, broken reflections varying the gloss of its panels; to my left were the muffled windows; a great looking-glass between them repeated the vacant majesty of the bed and room [...] I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit. I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors [...] (12).

First, the reader gets a sense from this passage that Jane's vision is being forced towards the mirror as on one side of the room she is met with 'subdued, broken reflections' in the gloss of the furniture, giving the effect of a disorientating hall-of-mirrors, and on the other she is denied visual freedom by the 'muffled windows', the mirror between them thus becoming her only source of vision. No critic has considered the type of mirror Brontë employs here and yet the description of a mirror between windows is one she returns to again in a similar scene in *Villette* and is therefore arguably one of symbolic significance. This description is likely a reference to the 'pier glass' made popular in bourgeois homes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This mirror was "intended to be hung on a pier between the windows of a room, this looking glass was designed as an additional 'window' [...] The large sheets of glass framed by narrow moldings mimicked a window".<sup>8</sup> By blending inconspicuously with the windows the pier glass demonstrates how reflection can occur inadvertently in the domestic interior when a viewer, who is expecting the transparent vision of the window, is met instead with a mirror which forces their gaze back inside the room.

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<sup>8</sup> Tammis K. Groft and Mary Alice Mackay, *Albany Institute of History & Art: 200 Years of Collecting* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998), p.220.



***Figure 2.1, 18th-century Rococo pier glass in the Amalienburg Pavilion, Schloss Nymphenburg. The addition of divisions in these mirrors more accurately mimics the mullioned window.***

If windows offer visual freedom from a space, then mirrors create a contrasting feeling of intimacy. As Jean Baudrillard explains in *The System of Objects*, mirrors “close off space, presuppose a wall, refer back to the centre of the room. The more mirrors there are, the more glorious the intimacy of the room, albeit more turned in upon itself”.<sup>9</sup> The contrast between external and internal space created by the pier glass creates a resulting sense of depth in its reflection, transforming the mirror from something like a two-dimensional image to a three-dimensional space. Hope Werness has explored the mirror’s associations with psychological and temporal bridging through its potential for revealing the doppelganger and its use in spiritual practices such as scrying and divination. However, she also notes that amongst these “universal themes”, its “property of reversing that which it reflects” also implies “that there may be a parallel universe on its other side”.<sup>10</sup> This is perhaps one of its best known fantastical applications in literature, as evidenced by Lewis Carroll’s widely popular 1871 novel, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Perhaps the most illuminating consideration of the mirror as a ‘space’ comes from Michel Foucault’s 1986 essay, ‘Of Other Spaces’, where he argues that the mirror occupies a unique position between non-hegemonic or ‘othered’ spaces within society which he calls ‘utopias’ and ‘heterotopias’.<sup>11</sup>

Foucault explains that the more familiar ‘utopia’ represents an idealised yet unreal space whereas the ‘heterotopia’ is a real, yet in some way mythic, space removed from society. He considers graveyards, museums, and fairgrounds as heterotopias as they challenge social structures, disturb familiar concepts of time, or are ‘Othered’ in a way that separates them from the everyday. He then argues that the mirror offers a space that confuses the boundary between utopia and heterotopia as,

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface [...] it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.<sup>12</sup>

In the red room, the description of the ‘depths’ and ‘hollow’ of the mirror opens it up as a ‘virtual space’ for potential occupation and this allows for a deeper than surface level act of ‘self-reflection’. Indeed, by seeing the self in a different space, ‘there where I am not’, within the ‘unreal, virtual space’ that is the mirror’s reflection, the alternative geography of the mirror acts as a psycho-spatial

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), p.21.

<sup>10</sup> Hope Werness, *The Symbolism of Mirrors in Art From Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), p.4,3.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), pp. 22-27.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p.24.

heterotopia that allows the subject to inadvertently consider 'the position that I occupy'. For Jane, this is her 'position' as a social outcast: "I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there [...] a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest" (14). However, rather than being a negative or self-effacing experience, Jane's contemplation of her social position is crucial to inspiring her revolt and aiding her progression as she subsequently challenges her aunt and is moved to Lowood school.

Despite the rebellion that is achieved as a result of this scene, it has become popular to read Jane's meeting with the 'white face' with the 'effect of a real spirit' in the mirror as an example of a failed integration of a unified self as put forth by Jacques Lacan in his 'mirror stage' of psychological development. For instance, Beth Newman has argued that,

In an effort to master herself and her own seeing in her frightening [Jane] seeks here the reassuring pleasure of the mirror stage with its satisfying sense of self-recognition and self-knowledge, with the jubilation that comes of seeing oneself as whole, coherent, in control of oneself, and at the center of one's world. But at this moment in Jane's life the effort is doomed to failure [...] It returns to her an image of herself as the Reeds see her—precisely as other, devalued, tiny, insignificant, not worthy of being seen.<sup>13</sup>

Newman's reading of the mirror does not feel in keeping with the wider implications of the scene. First, it is necessary to remember that Jane does not consciously 'seek' the mirror in an attempt to unify or even contemplate the self. As Jane herself describes, 'I *had to* cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance *involuntarily* explored the depth it revealed' [emphasis added]. Furthermore, her experience with the 'Other' in the mirror should not be considered a failure of integration, as although Jane is frightened at first, she is eventually empowered by the experience of 'looking inward' the mirror provides as it aids in her narrative progression. Furthermore, although there is no doubt that Jane experiences herself as 'doubled' in the mirror, the image she perceives is not necessarily a reflection of how the Reed family perceive her either. The spectral, elfish description is intriguing and almost magical, it is certainly not inherently abject.

Rather than a Lacanian approach, Jungian psychoanalytical theory can be usefully applied here. In works such as *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, C. J. Jung considers the common psychological trope of the double as the 'shadow side' of the personality which represents "everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him

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<sup>13</sup> Beth Newman, *Subjects On Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), p.37-38.

directly or indirectly—for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies”.<sup>14</sup> The shadow-double thus represents the parts of the self that have been repressed, namely because the subject has been conditioned by society to see them as less than desirable. However, Jung states that the ‘shadow’ needs to be acknowledged and integrated if one is to achieve one’s full potential. If we consider Jane’s reflection as the externalization of her shadow self, then we can read the ‘strange little figure’, ‘half fairy, half imp’, as representing both her repressed difference to the Reed family, (the strangeness that makes her see herself as ‘Other’), and also her implied power as is it due to her inherent ‘difference’ as a rebellious and interrogative child that she is able to escape Gateshead Hall and the bourgeois oppression it symbolises.

As we will shortly see, at a significant moment later in the narrative, Jane once again meets with an image in the mirror that can be taken as the externalisation of her repressed ‘shadow self’, one that requires recognition and integration if she is to achieve her full individual and narrative potential. However, before this Brontë explores the varied ways society enforces women to subscribe to patriarchal ideals of femininity that encourages such repression. Jane’s development into adulthood takes place at Lowood school, an oppressive, patriarchal institution that demonstrates how young women’s creativity and individuality is stifled as they are moulded into ideals of submissive, complacent Victorian femininity. For instance, Jane witnesses the head teacher, Mr. Brocklehurst, force a young girl, Julia Severn, to cut her hair, its natural ringlets signifying an individuality that threatens the conservatism of the school where women “are not to conform to [their] nature” (73), but to patriarchal ideals of femininity as regulated and reserved instead. Most notably, there is an absence of mirrors in the Lowood sequence which supports Brontë’s technique of using stifled vision as a central metaphor for exploring the oppression Jane endures.

For instance, previously condemned by her aunt and cousin’s for, “always look[ing] as if she were watching everybody” (25), and for, “the look you had in your eyes” (7), at Lowood Jane learns how looking can be used for surveillance and punishment, describing the eyes of her peers “like burning-glasses against my scorched skin” (76) as she sustains the humiliating punishment of the gaze. The windows, mirrors, books, and pictures that offered Jane visual and psychological liberation at Gateshead are eclipsed here by “walls so high” they “exclude every glimpse of prospect” (54) and by the obscuring phallic shadow of the “black column” (70), Mr. Brocklehurst. For eight years at Lowood Jane’s vision is suppressed as she learns to bury her early “virulent passions” (16) to become a “better regulated” (99) young woman. However, when Jane approaches the window a rekindled vision is

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<sup>14</sup> C. J. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, in *The Collected Works*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull, ed. by Sir Herbert Read (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), p.284-285.

associated with the stirring of rebellion as she expresses how she “longed to surmount” the “boundary” of her “exile limits” (100). As we saw in the opening scene, the window presents a space of freedom, and often throughout the novel Jane approaches it to contemplate her position at moments that indicate impending change. Here, whilst gazing upon the limits of Lowood school, Jane boldly asks, “What do I want?” (102), and in an attempt to seek the “varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitement” (100) in life she takes up a position as a governess at Thornfield Hall.

There is a notable change in narrative style between the Lowood and Thornfield scenes that is visible from Jane’s first entrance into Edward Rochester’s abode. First, themes of mirroring and doubling are established to create a sense of optical overload that contrasts with the metaphors for stifled or denied vision that dominate at Lowood. For instance, Jane describes upon her entrance, “a room whose double illumination of fire and candle at first dazzled me” (114). This doubling of illumination is later associated with the master of the house as on their first formal meeting in the drawing-room Jane’s eyes are drawn to “[T]wo wax candles stood lighted on the table, and two on the mantelpiece” (146). As the reader will later learn, Rochester is the harbourer of a dark secret at Thornfield and can be said to lead a double life as both hero and villain. The repetition of illumination associated with Rochester and his residence is thus reflective of this dual existence and the tactics of deflection and beguilement put in place to conceal his corrupt secret. This is further implied when, preparing for the arrival of guests to Thornfield, Jane recalls how, “furniture [was] rubbed, flowers piled in vases [...] The hall, too, was scoured; and the great carved clock, as well as the steps and banisters of the staircase, were polished to the brightness of glass” (207). The act of cleaning and polishing the house ‘to the brightness of glass’ is symbolic of Rochester’s attempts to rid his home of unwanted traces of his depraved secret by constructing an outward illusion of both transparency and refinement.

Nevertheless, as Jane’s descriptions of the house reveal, rather than feeling light and open, Thornfield exudes a sense of dizzying excess in its grandiosity and glassy repletion, creating the effect of a captivating hall of mirrors which further signals its qualities of deception. The focus on glass and reflective surfaces continue in Jane’s detailing of the drawing room as she describes,

a large, stately apartment, with purple chairs and curtains, a Turkey carpet, walnut-panelled walls, one vast window rich in slanted glass, and a lofty ceiling, nobly moulded. Mrs. Fairfax was dusting some vases of fine purple spar [...] She pointed to a wide arch corresponding to the window, and hung like it with a Tyrian-dyed curtain, now looped up. Mounting to it by two broad steps, and looking through, I thought I caught a glimpse of a fairy place, so bright to my novice-eyes appeared the view beyond. Yet it was merely a very pretty drawing-room, and within it a boudoir, both



spread with white carpets, on which seemed laid brilliant garlands of flowers; both ceiled with snowy mouldings of white grapes and vine-leaves, beneath which glowed in rich contrast crimson couches and ottomans; while the ornaments on the pale Parian mantelpiece were of sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red; and between the windows large mirrors repeated the general blending of snow and fire (125).

Like the red room, Jane here describes a space where visually distorting reflections are produced from multiple sources. Not only are there three references to windows in this image, one featuring the familiar pier glass implied by the windows separated by 'large mirrors', but descriptions of vases of 'spar', a type of mineral crystal, 'sparkling bohemian glass', and glowing crimson furniture combine with the exotic 'Otherness' of the 'Turkey carpet' and ottomans to create what Jane describes as a seductive 'fairy place'.

Jean Baudrillard has commented on the use of mirrors and mirrored furnishings in affluent homes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for affording "the self-indulgent bourgeois individual the opportunity to exercise his privilege – to reproduce his own image and revel in his possessions".<sup>15</sup> Certainly, there is a seductive quality to the reflective properties of glass as "glass creates an aura of glamour and duplicity – a 'double lustre' – in the two-way passage of vision".<sup>16</sup> However, the uncanny visual disturbance of the Thornfield interior can perhaps be explained by the fact that, historically, duplicity and doubling has also been associated with a threatening and deceiving 'Otherness', often in the form of a doppelgänger.<sup>17</sup> The duplicitous descriptions of Rochester's abode suggest a space of optical overload reflective of his attempts to deceive Jane by masking his villainy through a sort of fairy tale enchantment. However, more than simply standing for the deceptive doubling that occurs at Thornfield on a material level, this concept can be applied to the overarching way in which the narrative itself can be seen to create a doubling or 'mirroring' of realist and Gothic narratives.

Criticism on the genre of *Jane Eyre* varies widely with critics variously reading the novel as containing elements of the fairy tale, folklore, the Gothic, realism, and the bildungsroman.<sup>18</sup> Although

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<sup>15</sup> Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, p.21.

<sup>16</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University press, 2008), p.97.

<sup>17</sup> See Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. by Harry Tucker Jr. (USA: University of North Carolina Press, 1971).

<sup>18</sup> For fairy tale connections see Victoria Anderson, 'Investigating the Third Story: 'Bluebeard' and 'Cinderella' in *Jane Eyre*', in Ruth Bienstock Anolik ed., *Horrifying Sex: Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), pp.111–121., For folklore connections see Sarah R. Wakefield, *Folklore in British Literature: Naming and Narrating in Women's Fiction, 1750-1880* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2006)., For Gothic connections see Tamar Heller, '*Jane Eyre*, Bertha and the Female Gothic', in Diane Long

it is now widely accepted that the Brontë's were "deeply hybrid writers", *Jane Eyre* offers a particularly complex example of hybridity that has a tendency to be misunderstood.<sup>19</sup> The most reductive readings consider a tension between the outward realism that the novel supposedly promises as an autobiography and its seemingly intruding fantastic elements, or a tension between 'domestic romance' and the 'Gothic tale' as Jerome Beaty suggested.<sup>20</sup> Others such as Linda Peterson have argued that, "the gothic signals male interpretive power and loss of female freedom. It supports Rochester's view of events rather than Jane's control of her life and life story", thus considering the Gothic elements as a patriarchal "invasion" on the "autobiographical independence" Jane's narrative attempts.<sup>21</sup> Even in a more recent article, Laura Zuber argues that, "Jane escapes the Gothic romance to enter a new literary genre" at the end of the novel, "one that is realist".<sup>22</sup> However, readings that see the text's inclusion of elements of Gothic and realism as somehow in conflict or antithetical to one another overlook the subversive application of the fantastic and its potential for providing a space for covert female power. Moreover, such criticisms ignore the role Jane herself plays in consciously drawing upon fantastic narratives to aid her storytelling.

Indeed, critics commonly overlook the fact that Jane is not just the first-person narrator of the novel but its self-confessed autobiographer also. This implies the process of a retrospective reconfiguring of her life story into a 'narrative'. From the beginning of the novel, the reader is made aware that Jane is an avid lover of fiction, from her interest in Bessie's folklore tales to her adolescent reading of "Gulliver's Travels and the Arabian Nights" and "Bewick's British Birds" (285), the latter in which she "transforms the realism of the book's Arctic scenes of migrating birds into a Gothic mode".<sup>23</sup> This can be seen to set up the way Jane draws upon traditional, patriarchal narratives to compare and contrast her own experiences. Jane makes the reader explicitly aware of the potential of narrative

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Hoeverler ed. *Approaches to Teaching Brontë's Jane Eyre* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1993), pp.49-55., For realism connections see Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth Century Literature* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997)., For bildungsroman connections see Hyeyoung Lee, 'Jane Eyre as Christian Bildungsroman', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 6:1 (2002), pp.55-75.

<sup>19</sup> John Bowen, 'The Brontës and the Transformations of Romanticism', in John Kucich and Jenny Bourne ed. *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: Volume Three, The Nineteenth-Century Novel, 1820-1880* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.203-219 (p.207).

<sup>20</sup> Jerome Beaty, 'Jane Eyre and Genre', *Genre*, 10 (1977), pp.619-654.

<sup>21</sup> Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p.89.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Zuber, "'I can but die': The Gothic Cycle of Death and Rebirth in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*", *The Common Room*, 11:2 (2008). Accessed online at [[http://departments.knox.edu/engdept/commonroom/Volume\\_Eleven/number\\_two/Zuber/index.html](http://departments.knox.edu/engdept/commonroom/Volume_Eleven/number_two/Zuber/index.html)] 03/01/2020].

<sup>23</sup> Alison Milbank, 'The Victorian Gothic in English Novel and Stories, 1830-1880', in Jerrold E. Hogle ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.145-166 (p.152).

embellishment when she states, "I am only bound to invoke Memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest" (98). This declaration highlights the novel's metatextual consciousness; Jane understands her position as a writer and the need to evoke the reader's interest in her life story. More than this, however, that she most frequently parallels her story to fairy tale and Gothic narratives, narratives which have historically imagined women in situations of victimhood, provides her with the opportunity to subvert them and offer an alternative ending for women.

Robyn Warhol is one of few critics who has considered the effects of this narrative doubling. Warhol's study is illuminating as she draws upon a wealth of feminist criticism on the concept of 'doubling' to reveal how it is often used by women writers not to signal difference or encourage binaries, but to reveal the narrowing or even collapsing of oppositions.<sup>24</sup> From Luce Irigaray's concept of female sexuality and language as working like 'two lips in continuous contact' to Elaine Showalter's recognition of the woman writer's 'double-voiced discourse', Warhol notes how,

Doubleness is figured as both feminine and feminist, as a strategy for negotiating differences between and within male and female, center and margin, inside and outside, public and private, realism and romance. To be "double" is to resist categorization as one thing or the other; to invoke "doubleness" is to address binary oppositions without resting comfortably in either of the two terms being opposed.<sup>25</sup>

Warhol's study is useful for seeing how doubling of all forms has been used by women writers to collapse boundaries and bring oppositional themes and images closer via comparison. This allows her to read the doubling of genres in *Jane Eyre* as negotiating a proximity between realism and romance reflective of the true 'reality' of female experience. Whilst I agree with this, Warhol neglects to consider how the many instances of physical mirror doubling in the text serve to reflect this narrative doubling. Even Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, who builds upon Warhol's argument and makes explicit reference to the mirror when she states that, "Brontë may well hint at the fact that the recycling of genres might also be turned into a metatextual mirror: entrapping women's stories into a genre to mimic the formula-ridden lives of domestic women", fails to note how the physical mirror helps to

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<sup>24</sup> Robyn R. Warhol, 'Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*', *English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36:4 (1996), pp.857-875.

<sup>25</sup> See Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1985)., Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977)., Warhol, 'Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*', p.857.

literally 're-produce' narrative readings of 'metatextual mirroring' in the novel, despite her choice phrase.<sup>26</sup>

This oversight is surprising considering that mirrors are used exclusively in scenes that refer to or draw upon fairy tale or Gothic narratives. It has been noted by critics of fairy tales that, "[T]he image of the mirror famously plays a major part in the fairy tale tradition".<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, this refers to the mirror as a physical symbol as in the tale of 'Snow White' the mirror takes on what La Belle saw as a traditional role as a "stand-in for a man or for male-dominated society in general" as it reflects back to the Evil Queen patriarchal society's confirmed standards of beauty.<sup>28</sup> However, this also refers to the way in which the fairy tale has acted historically as a "mimetic narrative" that "silently assume[s] a set of social conventions" and works to enforce those conventions by reflecting them back to society in allegorical forms.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, fairy tales have been considered to "encode a patriarchal ideology", or act like a 'patriarchal mirror' on society by repeatedly mimicking the "re-production of gender construction" which "frames" women in "an image of beauty and suffering – the 'innocent persecuted heroine'".<sup>30</sup> However, it has also been noted that women writers have subverted this idea of the fairy tale as a mimetic form that upholds patriarchal standards by turning it into a mirror reflective of women's real experiences.

The subversion of fairy tale narratives is perhaps most commonly associated with twentieth century women writers such as Angela Carter and Tanith Lee, who in the aftermath of second-wave feminism used these traditionally patriarchal narratives, abound with symbolism of "mirrors, vision and revision", to "[re-present] feminine subjectivity" and rewrite women's narratives for subversive and ironic effect.<sup>31</sup> However, the influence of earlier writers such as Charlotte Brontë in foregrounding this tradition of female fairy tale subversion has been far less explored. Jack Zipes has noted how nineteenth century writers were amongst the first to use the fairy tale "as a radical mirror" to reflect what was wrong with society, but his focus on George MacDonald, Oscar Wilde and L. Frank Baum ignores the role of earlier women writers.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Veronica Schanoes has suggested that, "*Jane*

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<sup>26</sup> Laurence Talairach Vielmas, 'Legacies of the Past: The Buried Stories of Thornfield Hall' *Anglophonia, French Journal of English Studies*, 15 (2004), pp.119-130 (p.121).

<sup>27</sup> Dani Cavallaro, *The World of Angela Carter: A Critical Investigation* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2011), p.185.

<sup>28</sup> La Belle, *Herself Beheld*, p.28.

<sup>29</sup> Christina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp.34,35.

<sup>30</sup> Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p.1., Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, p.35.

<sup>31</sup> Veronica L. Schanoes, *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory: Feminism and Retelling the Tale* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), p.1.

<sup>32</sup> Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

*Eyre* may allude to both 'Cinderella' and 'Bluebeard,' but it would be a far stretch to argue that the novel is a revision of either story", and thus overlooks the way in which Brontë does indeed rework, perhaps not entire stories, but important themes and common narrative patterns of traditional fairy tales that highlight the female experience of powerlessness and subordination within patriarchal society.<sup>33</sup> One of the ways Brontë achieves this is by drawing attention to the way the male perceptions of the fairy tale differs from the reality of the female experience within it.

For instance, we have seen how Jane describes the Thornfield interior as like a 'fairy place', but as her romantic relationship with Rochester develops it becomes apparent that he is attempting to cast Jane in a traditional role within his own idea of a fairy tale romance that she sees as oppressive. On their first meeting, Rochester tells Jane that she possesses, "rather the look of another world", one that he explicitly states makes him think, "unaccountably of fairy tales" (149). He consistently attempts to force Jane into an idealised fairy tale image of femininity and passivity from this point. Despite his romantic facade, Rochester's desire to bestow Jane with gifts to beautify her, to "clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings" and "attire my Jane in satin and lace [...] I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil" (326), clearly imply acts of control as the verbs 'clasp' and 'load' reveal. Indeed, Jane directly likens herself to an imprisoned slave when she states that, "I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched" (339). Despite her resistance, the way Rochester repeatedly refers to Jane as an "elf" (325), "sprite" (330), "fairy" (337), "changeling" (345), and "witch" (341) reveals his attempts to deny her reality and transform even her resistance to his fictionalisation into part of his fairy tale story.

One of the ways Jane resists Rochester's attempt to mould her into a mirror image of male desire, (to transform her, Cinderella-like, from pauper to princess), is to subvert the function of the physical mirror as it has been understood in fairy tale's as a 'stand-in for a man or for male-dominated society' and instead use mirror-gazing for autonomous self-definition. The first mirror scene at Thornfield takes place on the morning after Jane's engagement. As Rochester excitedly speaks of transforming Jane into a fairy tale bride, she reminds him that should she follow his ideal of femininity, "I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket – a jay in borrowed plumes" (326). In an attempt to re-enforce her own self-defined identity, Jane turns to the mirror:

While arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect and life in its colour; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of

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<sup>33</sup> Schanoes, *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p.13.

fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple. I had often been unwilling to look at my master, because I feared he could not be pleased at my look; but I was sure I might lift my face to his now, and not cool his affection by its expression. I took a plain but clean and light summer dress from my drawer and put it on: it seemed no attire had ever so well become me, because none had I ever worn in so blissful a mood (324).

Situated between Rochester's analogies and a romanticised encounter with a beggar-woman to whom Jane gifts some money, (a scene with fairy tale connotations furthered by the enchanting description of singing birds which Jane describes as "musical as my own rejoicing heart" (324)), this encounter with the mirror could be seen as one in keeping with its fairy tale surroundings. However, Jane does not experience the mirror as a "glass coffin" freezing her in an image of male defined beauty as in the tale of Snow White, and nor does she go through a Cinderella-like transformation from plain pauper to regal beauty in order to reproduce patriarchal society's desired concept of femininity.<sup>34</sup> Instead, Jane pictures herself dressing, an act symbolic of the concept of 'self-fashioning', and instead of assuming the image of femininity Rochester desires, she depicts acceptance and pleasure in an image of her own characterisation as a "plain, Quakerish governess" (326). Furthermore, by recognising that it is her own 'mood' that elevates her self-perception, Jane maintains authority over the mirror's gaze as it reflects to her an image governed by her own emotions. Jane can thus be seen to directly invert the function of the patriarchal fairy tale mirror as it possesses no magical qualities and reflects no inscribed feminine idealism, but rather acts to reinforce Jane's desire to be a self-creating subject.

The subversion of the mirror in this scene is used to reflect the control Jane attempts over her identity, grounding herself in the 'reality' she finds in the opportunity for self-definition whilst it is her surroundings at Thornfield that threaten to imprison her within an oppressive structure or 'frame'. The distinction between external appearance and inner reality in these scenes are in keeping with the way the narrative seems to suggest that there is something more sinister going on beneath the surface at Thornfield that Jane is initially blind to. For instance, Mrs. Fairfax, a fairy godmother type figure, warns Jane that, "[I]t is an old saying that 'all is not gold that glitters'; and in this case I do fear there will be something found to be different to what either you or I expect" (333). This makes direct reference to the glittering beguilement of the glass-replete Thornfield interior. Rochester furthers this when he ominously warns Jane that, "[T]he glamour of inexperience is over your eyes [...] and you see it through a charmed medium: you cannot discern that the gilding is slime and the silk draperies cobwebs" (270). What these allegorical warnings are referring to is the suggestion that beneath the

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<sup>34</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.36.

'glamour' and 'glitter' of the fairy tale façade, there lies amongst the 'slime' and 'cobwebs' a hidden, Gothic secret waiting to be uncovered at Thornfield Hall.

The secret of Thornfield is that Rochester has a wife, Bertha Mason, who he has held captive for ten years in a third storey chamber. However, rather than confirming the hiddenness of a 'Gothic secret' that has been alluded to throughout, what the revealing of Bertha actually achieves is the closing of difference between the fairy tale and the Gothic as her unveiling suggests that the fairy tale has been, all along, a narrative of Gothic propensity. Rochester attempts to separate the two by locating Gothic horror with his wife in Thornfield's upper stories and upholding a pretence of nobility and seduction in the lower levels. Yet in an act of feminist collapsing of doubling, Jane's narrative reveals that the latter has only ever been a 'gilded' façade of the former as the two exist together in the same house and are fundamentally the same thing, at least for women. This is what Bertha's "demonic laugh—low, suppressed, and deep" (182) foreshadows when it permeates through Jane's bedroom walls, defying the boundaries of their physical separation. As a rewriting of a Bluebeard narrative, a pertinent combination of fairy tale and Gothic, this is also what Bertha and Jane's intertwined stories suggest when they are finally drawn together and the reader can make comparisons between Bertha's fate and Jane's implied narrative trajectory. However, that Jane does not follow in Bertha's footsteps demonstrates another significant effect of the collapsing of doubling that occurs through the revealing of Bertha. Indeed, Jane does not simply draw upon fantastic narratives to parallel them to her experience, but rather she uses them to alter and subvert her own implied narrative fate. This is achieved through the suggestion that Bertha is not simply an example of Jane's possible future position, but that she represents an aspect of Jane herself.

This association is made explicit in the novel's climactic mirror scene where Jane and Bertha first meet. However, in the lead up to their meeting, images of doubling increase at Thornfield to encourage comparison. First, there is the splitting in half of "the great horse-chestnut" (311) tree in the garden. This symbolises the splitting of identity Jane experiences in the lead up to her wedding, torn between attempts at self-definition and the new identity she will be forced to adopt as Mrs. Rochester. Then, on the eve of her wedding, the duplicity of identity created by Rochester's divisive classifications is fully internalised as Jane questions, "am I a monster[?]" (334), and refers to herself in the third person, stating that the future "Mrs Rochester [...] did not exist: she would not be born till tomorrow" (347). Whilst this 'Mrs Rochester' has not yet been born, Jane possesses "garments said to be hers", a "suit of wedding rainment; the pearl-coloured robe, the vapoury veil pendent" that "displaced my black stuffy Lowood frock" (347). The plain attire that Jane once celebrated for its

humble simplicity is usurped here by a wedding gown which 'vapoury' ghostliness reflects the symbolic death of the Victorian woman's autonomy in marriage.

One evening, Jane describes how she, "shut the closet to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel it contained" (347), as if shutting the door on the apparition of her future self. However, something strange happens that night which Jane recalls to Rochester days later. She explains that "a form emerged from the closet", it was,

a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back. I know not what dress she had on: it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell [...] she took my veil from its place; she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror. At that moment I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass [...] oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face (358).

In 1979, Gilbert and Gubar popularised a reading of Bertha as Jane's "truest and darkest double".<sup>35</sup> Noting the physical parallels between the two throughout the text, like when Jane describes pacing "along the corridor of the third storey, backwards and forwards" (132), only to have been unknowingly feet away from the captive Bertha who "ran backwards and forwards" (370) in her cell in a similar manner, they argue that, "on a figurative and psychological level it seems suspiciously clear that the spectre of Bertha is still another – indeed the most threatening – avatar of Jane".<sup>36</sup> However, by failing to address the role of the mirror in this scene two important details are overlooked. First, how a consideration of the psychological connotations of the mirror and its parallels to the red room scene encourages a Jungian reading of Bertha as Jane's shadow self; and second, how Bertha's emergence from the mirror creates a significant subversion of the narrative mirroring or doubling the text has employed thus far.

Indeed, Bertha might be described as coming forth from the closet, but that Jane sees her face in the reflection in the mirror is integral to psychological readings as this suggests that she sees Bertha like she would the reflection of her own image. The similarities between this scene and the initial mirror scene in the red room are clear, as when Jane experiences a loss of consciousness before the appearance of Bertha she states it was, "for the second time in my life – only the second time" (359). Indeed, it was in the red room that Jane first expressed a doubling of identity as, "something spoke out of me over which I had no control" (28), and she is accused of possessing a "dangerous duplicity"

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<sup>35</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.360.

<sup>36</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.359.



and “transitory power” (16). It is therefore encouraged that we read Bertha as another example of Jane’s ‘shadow self’ as symbolically revealed in the mirror. Gilbert and Gubar suggested that Bertha represents the growth of the original spirit figure, but as Jungian psychoanalysis argues that repression can occur at different stages throughout life, this allows us to recognise Bertha’s monstrous image as reflecting aspects of Jane’s adult repressed personality. Indeed, the image of the spirit was otherworldly, a reflection of her underdeveloped yet dangerous potential for power and defiance of authority as a young girl. Bertha, however, is a woman, and a specifically large, strong, and Gothically ‘monstrous’ woman who is the opposite of all the fairy tale feminine qualities of reservation, beauty, and placidity that Rochester desired Jane to conform to.

If female narrative doubling works to show sameness rather than difference, then so too does the doubling effects of the mirror. But this is taken a step further with the appearance of Bertha as she does not remain within the mirror, she steps forth as symbolic of Jane’s integration with the shadow self. In crossing over from her repressed and merely eluded to textual position and into the dominant narrative, Bertha does not simply repeat Gothic convention, she offers the opportunity for subversion. For instance, Bertha may come forth under traditionally Gothic circumstances, after Jane’s dream “That Thornfield Hall was a dreary ruin, the retreat of bats and owls” and as an image of a phantom bride or “vampyre” (356). Furthermore, Jane may even draw attention to an implied fictionality of the Gothic events of Bertha’s emergence when she declares to Rochester that, “the preface” has been spoken, “the tale it yet to come” (357). However, when we see Bertha as a double for Jane, we can see how she subverts the reader’s expectations of the Gothic monster as instead of posing a threat to the heroine, she fulfils certain functions as Jane’s ‘shadow’ self that lead Jane to socioeconomic and narrative power.

The first way Bertha aids Jane is by giving her a reason to flee Thornfield Hall and, in doing so, Jane finds her estranged family and comes into an inheritance of her own. Jane thus leaves Thornfield as a penniless orphan, but this transformation means that when she returns, she has both social and financial power of her own which lessens the power Rochester held over her as both her employer and future husband. The burning down of Thornfield is perhaps the most important symbolic act Bertha commits as Jane’s shadow self as it signals the destruction of the patriarchal fairy tale ‘frame’ that threatened to imprison Jane but that she had resisted throughout the narrative. Bertha’s own destruction in the process is also necessary as it puts an end to the Gothic doubling by suggesting that Jane has successfully integrated with her repressed, shadow self. Should Bertha have continued independently of Jane, readings of her doubling would be compromised. Furthermore, Jane’s description of the remains of Thornfield, “very fragile-looking, perforated with paneless windows: no

roof, no battlements, no chimneys—all had crashed in” (356), is reflective of the ‘fragility’ of the now exposed and vulnerable Rochester without Thornfield, whilst also signalling the ‘crashing in’ of the patriarchal values Thornfield represented. As a result of this, Rochester is also maimed as he is blinded in one eye and suffers an injury to his hand that leads to amputation. Although this reflects the biblical teaching that those prone to sin should cut off their hand and pluck out their eye to avoid temptation of adulteration, (a fitting punishment for Rochester’s sins of attempted bigamy), his blinding is also significant to the wider theme of vision employed throughout the text.

We saw earlier how throughout her narrative, Jane has possessed a vision that has been considered dangerously powerful by others and thus as a result, its repression has been variously attempted. Rochester posed the biggest threat to Jane’s vision as it stood as a metaphor for her autonomous role as the narrative autobiographer as he attempted to take control of her narrative and imprison her in a fairy tale framework. However, by the end of the novel there is a restructuring of vision as power within their relationship as Jane reveals, “I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you”, but most significantly, “to be eyes and hands to you” (556). Rochester’s blinding is both punishment for his controlling attempts and a warning to never infringe upon Jane’s vision again. Indeed, Jane’s desire to control the ‘eye’ also reflects concerns over the controlling of her narrative ‘I’ as Brontë conflates Jane’s desire for autonomy over her identity and her choices with her desire to control narrative representation and the autobiographical retelling of her life story. Indeed, as we have seen, it is not only Jane’s identity that is threatened by Rochester as by beguiling her with a ‘gilded’ façade at Thornfield she nearly unconsciously falls into a Bluebeard fate and a repressed or buried position in her own narrative. Ultimately, Brontë uses the woman whose ‘eye/I’ is repressed, deflected and de-centered to explore how women’s identity and autonomy is buried in the institution of marriage and written into the margins of narrative history in the process. For Jane, positioned as the narrator of her own experience, to take control over precast narratives and rewrite a position of female power within them is to take control over the ‘patriarchal mirror’ of narrative fiction and rewrite its function.

Of course, it is necessary to acknowledge that some critics have questioned proto-feminist readings of the novel’s end. Jean Wyatt is amongst critics who have struggled to coincide Jane’s youthful protest against the bourgeois family dynamic and the gender hierarchies it prescribes with her quest for traditional romantic fulfilment in the conclusion. She states that,

On the level of lucid and compelling rhetoric, Brontë advocates feminist ideals - arguing against patriarchal structures that confine and subordinate women and for a wider field for

women's endeavours - while underneath flows, un-checked, a passionate desire for the fusions of romantic love.<sup>37</sup>

Wyatt uses Freudian psychoanalysis to argue that the novel's prevailing popularity amongst female readers is due to the fact that it plays out fantasies of rebellion against the traditional domestic family unit whilst in the end conforming to women's oedipal desire for a romantic union with the patriarchal father figure. However, readings that see the ending as fully submissive run the risk of being just as reductive as those that enforce an entirely positive reading in keeping with the narrative of feminist rebellion.

When it comes to the ending of *Jane Eyre*, it is necessary to accept that an element of irresolvable contradiction occurs as a result of Brontë's desire to reimagine women's narrative lives whilst at the same time adhering, at least to an extent, to the expectations and conventions of her form. After all, if the novel is to make any real, genuine comments on the female position at the time Brontë was writing, it would need to maintain a level of realism in terms of what it offers as legitimate alternatives to the frustrations of the female position. Lauren Owsley has suggested that Jane's "realistic – albeit serendipitous" ending shows necessary limitations to what Jane can achieve alone as should she should have accessed power through sheer rebellion that would have been, "according to Victorian standards, entirely improbable and irresponsible".<sup>38</sup> The ethical duty of realism to provide a 'realistic' reflection of the world can also help justify the text's contested use of narrative doubling. For instance, Bette London has taken issue with the way the novel seemingly "exposes and corrects the woman's irregular traits: the marks of the child, the criminal, the ill, and insane" through externalised female figures such as Helen Burns, Adèle Varens, and Bertha Rochester, arguing that in doing so Brontë suggests that these "poses of feminine deviancy constitute the other side of approved femininity" that Jane then safely adopts.<sup>39</sup> In other words, she argues that the separation of aspects of Jane's self into figures external from her perpetuates the very division of female identity that the text criticises by separating .

However, it is necessary to remember that throughout the novel, especially during Jane's formative Gateshead and Lowood years, Brontë reveals the ways patriarchal society punishes the non-conforming, non-traditional woman. Even with her seemingly character-altering experience at

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<sup>37</sup> Jean Wyatt, 'A Patriarch of One's Own: *Jane Eyre* and Romantic Love', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 4:2 (1985), pp.199-216 (p.214).

<sup>38</sup> Lauren Owsley, 'Charlotte Brontë's Circumvention of Patriarchy: Gender, Labour and Financial Agency in *Jane Eyre*', *Brontë Studies*, 38:1 (2013), pp.54-65 (p.62).

<sup>39</sup> Bette London, 'The Pleasures of Submission: *Jane Eyre* and the Production of the Text', *ELH*, 58:1 (1991), pp. 195-213 (p.200).

Lowood and with the Jane-Bertha split that redirects the explicit revelation of Jane's rage, Brontë's protagonist was still considered by critics at the time as a "dogged" and "revengeful" young woman.<sup>40</sup> Thus the fact that Brontë deals with this covertly by implementing doubles in both character and narrative, applying what Elaine Showalter called "a double-voiced discourse", a "'dominant' and a 'muted' story", demonstrates a necessary and legitimate means of exploring female multiplicity that remains, at least to an extent, within the bounds of a realistic depiction of femininity demanded by her audience.<sup>41</sup> Even Brontë herself adopted a double identity by writing under a male alias as a means of avoiding the unjust judgement and scrutiny faced by women writers who wrote outside the traditional domestic romances and didactic fiction expected of their sex. This did not undermine the feminist undertones of her writing, but rather allowed her more freedom as a writer. In light of these considerations, the Jane-Bertha split can in itself be considered a reflection on and critique of the ways in which patriarchal societies force women to hide and therefore split their multidimensionality and suppress what is not seen as 'properly' or legitimately feminine behaviour.

As I have suggested, *Jane Eyre* is not a novel that depicts totally unchecked rebellion. Rather, both protagonist and reader often meet with the limits of the possibility of a female position outside of the dominant, patriarchal structures. This, I believe, is represented in the novel's ending, which concludes with what some have seen as Jane's ominous occupation of Ferndean as Rochester's wife, but which I consider as an apt example of the sameness with difference implied by narrative mirroring. Michelle Massé considers the Gothic narrative as a mirror repeating women's traumatic position in patriarchal societies as the seemingly unchanged structure of the Gothic narrative depicts a woman who flees a tyrant-father figure, (and a position of oppression in her childhood home), only to end up marrying a tyrant-husband and living an adult life of comparable infantilisation and subordination.<sup>42</sup> Masse thus considers Ferndean as a sinister replica of Thornfield. However, I believe that *Jane Eyre* offers something more hopeful in the mirroring and eventual collapsing of Gothic and realist narratives it employs. Like the ending of the novel which seems to resolve in compromise, Jane conforming to a position as wife and carer, but one who is in control of her individual and narrative 'I', Ferndean represents a space of compromise also, a space of sameness yet difference in relation to Thornfield that offers a realistic depiction of the limits of change. This, I believe, is a more accurate reflection of mirror symbolism and its application in the text. After all, the mirror does not promise mimetic likeness, it offers an image that reverses what it reflects. Jane's drawing upon of fantastic

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<sup>40</sup> H. F. Chorley, 'unsigned review',  *Athenaeum*, 23 October 1847, in Miriam Allott ed. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.71-72.

<sup>41</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', *Critical Inquiry*, 8:2 (1981), pp. 179-205 (p.204).

<sup>42</sup> Michelle A. Massé, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

narratives as a type of metatextual mirroring relies on this sameness with difference as the aim is not to write an entirely new and antithetical narrative to the existing ones she draws upon, but to reimagine and rewrite the female position within them. Where critics go wrong is in their desire and expectation to see the frame destroyed completely. Whilst Jane may not be liberated from the traditional mirror/narrative frame entirely, she does destroy the mirror's traditional role as a patriarchal 'glass coffin' and reconstructs an image that places herself at its centre. Indeed, in the end the reader sees Jane as the central subject and creator of her own life story, and it is this narrative control and centralisation, rather than her rebellion, that is the true measure of her power.

### DE-CENTRING THE FEMALE SUBJECT IN *VILLETTE*

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë provided her readers with an opening image that placed the protagonist at its centre, hung like a portrait in the window-seat, and the narrative thereafter followed Jane as she battled to maintain that central position. However, until at least chapter 4 of *Villette*, the heroine and first-person narrator, Lucy Snowe, is unusually absent or de-centred from the text. Instead of piecing together a profile of the protagonist as one might attempt at the beginning of a novel, Lucy evades the reader's observation and displaces their position by situating herself as the observer of others, adopting an almost omniscient narrative perspective. As outlined in the introduction, this has been read by critics as a consciously misleading technique, one that frustrates the reader's access to the text. However, I wish to demonstrate that *Villette* simply offers a different approach to the revealing of female psychological reality to *Jane Eyre* as it reflects Charlotte Brontë's desire to experiment with alternative ways of writing the female subject and representing female experience. Indeed, as I will shortly reveal, Brontë uses the mirror in *Villette* to critique identity building that focuses on physical appearance as Lucy's study of female characters reveals the way in which women internalise the male gaze and objectify themselves in their conformity to standards of femininity. As a result, the protagonist-narrator avoids the mirror and its suggestion of a linear construction of identity, asserting instead a narrative of consciousness and thus a non-localised subjectivity.

*Villette* opens with the first of many human objects of study for the narrator, Paulina Home, an "exceedingly tiny", "doll"-like figure who arrives at the Bretton household where Lucy is visiting as an amorphous "shawled bundle" (9) in the arms of a servant.<sup>43</sup> Polly is the daughter of Mr. Home, the distant cousin of Lucy's godmother, Mrs. Bretton, and is depicted as a doting and self-sacrificing child

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<sup>43</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, ed. by Herbert Rosengarten & Margaret Smith (Oxford & London: Oxford University Press; The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of the Brontës: 1984). All subsequent references to the text will be taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited parenthetically.

who puts the needs of her father and other patriarchal figures before her own. Polly's function in the text is to serve as an example of the idealised bourgeois domestic femininity that Lucy rejects. As considered in the introduction, the prevailing domestic ideology of the mid-nineteenth century that saw the home as women's 'proper sphere' led to a proximity between women and the home that threatened their conflation. As Beverley Gordon notes, this was a time where women's "body and interior space were often seen and treated as if they were the same things".<sup>44</sup> Being both "responsible for ornamenting the home in that they were charged with the acquisition and arrangement of decorative objects", whilst they were "themselves expected to *be* ornamental", anxieties concerning a loss of identity and autonomy experienced by women became visible in the literature of the period.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the fact that she does not acknowledge its unnerving connotations, Nancy Armstrong's suggestion that the ideal domestic woman was expected to be so inconspicuous that she "disappear[ed] into the woodwork" of the household provides an apt metaphor for women's silenced and marginalised social position when confined to a role in the home.<sup>46</sup> In *Villette*, these concerns are expressed through Polly's relationship with domestic objects. For instance, scenes in which Polly performs traditional domestic duties appear through Lucy's narration as uncanny spectacles in which the object world becomes disturbingly animated, seemingly bestowed with a subjectivity that makes Polly appear object-like in return. For instance, in one early scene at Bretton, Lucy observes Polly serving her father tea and describes how,

Throughout the meal she continued her attentions: rather absurd they were. The sugar-tongs were too wide for one of her hands, and she had to use both in wielding them; the weight of the silver cream-ewer, the bread and butter plates, the very cup and saucer tasked her insufficient strength and dexterity; but she would lift this, hand that, and luckily contrived through it all to break nothing (19).

There is an 'absurdity' to Polly's juggling of the wide and weighty appliances in contrast to her "exceedingly tiny" (9) frame which echoes another mid-Victorian text that makes use of strange subject-object relationships and grotesque applications of size to explore anxieties concerning puberty and the progression of a young woman into a predestined feminine role, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).<sup>47</sup> Although the 'absurdity' of Polly's attempts implies a level of

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<sup>44</sup> Beverly Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 31:4 (1996), pp.281-301 (p.281).

<sup>45</sup> Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.89.

<sup>46</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of The Novel* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.80.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Richard Kelly, 'Introduction' in Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Broadview second edition (Ontario: Broadview, 2011), pp.9-50.

comicality, her actions are also clearly disturbing to Lucy and this is made clear in a following scene in which Lucy describes a particularly violent interaction between Polly and what has been considered a symbolic item of the “futility and purposelessness of domestic life” in the Victorian age, the sewing needle.<sup>48</sup>

In this scene, Lucy notes how,

[Polly] bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon – swerving from her control – inflicted a deeper stab wound than usual; but silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly (20).

Similarly to the sugar-tongs, the needle is here aligned with a ‘perverse weapon’, yet the use of ‘perseveringly’ alongside the phrase ‘pricking herself’ implies a grotesque and masochistic self-infliction to Polly’s actions as Brontë challenges the values of self-sacrifice and emotional endurance encouraged by domestic ideology. Furthermore, that the needle ‘swerved from her control’ again gives agency to the object and confuses the hierarchy of power within the subject-object relationship. The effect of these scenes ultimately relies on the disturbing relationship between subject and objects and can thus be usefully explored in terms of both the Freudian uncanny and through an understanding of Bill Brown’s ‘Thing Theory’.

In his 1919 essay, *Das Unheimliche*, Freud explores the uncanny, “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar”, through definitions of the German “*das Heimliche*, the ‘homely’”, and “*das Unheimliche*, the ‘unhomely’”.<sup>49</sup> He expresses that the ‘heimlich’ corresponds with that which is home-like, “familiar and comfortable”, but also that which is “concealed and kept hidden”.<sup>50</sup> Through these definitions he is able to demonstrate how that which is understood as ‘heimlich’ may move seamlessly into the ‘unheimlich’, something “uneasy, fearful”, through its ability to withhold ‘concealed’ meanings.<sup>51</sup> Freud touches on the uncanny potential of inanimate objects in a reference to Ernst Jentsch who credits, “doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate”, as a particular trait of the uncanny.<sup>52</sup> Freud himself uses the example of the doll of Olympia from E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman* (1817) to explore this uncanny uncertainty. Described

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<sup>48</sup> Kathryn Ledbetter, *Victorian Needlework* (California: Praeger, 2012), pp.1,5.

<sup>49</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London and New York: Penguin, 2003), p.124,148.

<sup>50</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.132.

<sup>51</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.131.

<sup>52</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.135.

by Lucy variously as a doll-like figure, “she looked like a mere doll [...] I observed her draw a square inch or two of pocket-handkerchief from the doll-pocket of her doll-skirt” (10), Polly evokes the Freudian uncanny as she casts doubt over her status as a subject, a characterization that acts to reflect the subordinate position of the domestic woman.

Furthermore, Polly’s interactions with the domestic materialism amongst which she is meant to be ‘at home’ as a middle-class woman, (as her name implies), becomes *unhomely* as the material world gathers agency, revolting against her attempts to govern as the properly domestic woman was expected to do. Indeed, in these scenes the uncanny is most successfully achieved through the threatening animation of domestic items like the sugar tongs and sewing needle that are transformed into weapon-like items. Bill Brown’s ‘thing theory’ explains that the uncanny ‘thing-like’ status objects accrue happens not through a Freudian ‘concealment’ of meaning but in the excess meaning that occurs when objects exceed their standard functions as commodities. Brown explains that, “[W]e begin to confront the thingness of objects [...] when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested”.<sup>53</sup> In these scenes, it is the weapon-like transformation of the otherwise mundane and functional domestic items that makes them appear strange and uncanny as they enter the realm of the ‘thing’. The thing is a mediation of the subject-object status, not quite conforming to either state, and thus Brown also notes how the ‘thing’ makes the subject consider their own ontological status:

The suddenness with which things seem to assert their presence and power: you cut your finger on a sheet of paper, you trip over some toy, you get bopped on the head by a falling nut. These are occasions outside the scene of phenomenological attention that nonetheless teach you that you’re ‘caught up in things’ and that the ‘body is a thing among things’.<sup>54</sup>

Polly’s interactions with the domestic items that unnaturally ‘assert their presence and power’ draws attention to her own ‘thing’-like status, as confirmed by Lucy who refers to her as “the minute thing” (19), “the little thing” (22). Certainly, amongst the agentic objects, Polly feels comparably emptied of subjectivity.

As these descriptions come through Lucy’s gaze and narration as a subjective experience of watching Polly, (we are not to believe that Polly is really a doll-sized child wielding gigantic sugar tongues), we can take them to reflect Lucy’s concern that the domestic woman, by fulfilling her duty in ‘disappearing into the woodwork’ of the home, loses her autonomy and subjecthood, becoming

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<sup>53</sup> Bill Brown, ‘Thing Theory’, *Critical Inquiry*, 28:1 (2001), pp.1-22 (p.4).

<sup>54</sup> Brown, ‘Thing Theory’, p.4.



merely a 'thing amongst things'. Lucy experiences her own loss of autonomy in a domestic role shortly after when she leaves Bretton to return to her family, only to find herself orphaned and in want of a position. Lucy takes up a position as a carer to a "rheumatic cripple" (47), Miss Marchmont. Her depiction of the role of female domestic servitude is one of painful isolation as she describes how, "[T]wo hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all" (50). The novel's first mirror scene occurs during this period as Lucy becomes "the watcher" of not only the invalid's "suffering" (48), but of her own affliction also. Here Lucy describes, "I saw myself in the glass, in my mourning-dress, a faded, hollow-eyed vision. Yet I thought little of the wan spectacle. The blight, I believed, was chiefly external: I still felt life at life's sources" (48). Like Jane, Lucy perceives herself as 'Othered' in the mirror as an expression of her diminished sense of self in a domestic situation in which she is unable to explore or express her identity. However, unlike Jane who continues a fascination with the mirror image and who seeks self-reflection to confirm her identity and to centralise herself within her narrative, Lucy brushes off the mirror experience as merely 'external' and chooses instead an outward looking vision.

After her isolated period as a carer, Lucy heads abroad in search of Villette, a city which explodes with social and visual spectacle to contrast with the claustrophobic and intimate domestic environments of her earlier life and with those that provide the sole backdrop to *Jane Eyre*. The outward-looking rather than self-exploring vision Lucy possesses is, as we have seen, evident from the beginning of novel where her narrative gaze avoids self-revelation through her study of Polly Home's character. Once Lucy arrives in Villette she continues to observe and critique and her gaze is particularly concerned with the various representations of women she encounters, from her occupational and social peers Madame Beck and Ginevra Fanshawe to artistic representations of women as depicted in the galleries and theatres she frequents. However, as Lucy immerses herself in the varied architecture of the city, the new public spaces she inhabits reveal a new possibility for Lucy herself to become the object of the gaze.

Arriving in Villette, Lucy takes up a position as a teacher at Madame Beck's school for girls. Although upon her entrance its "glittering salon, with porcelain stove, unlit, and gilded ornaments, and polished floor" (88) might make it appear like another beguiling Thornfield parlour, this is not a space where domestic secrets are kept hidden. Rather, the pensionnat manages themes and anxieties associated with the new public visibility of nineteenth century society. As we saw in the introduction, the nineteenth century has been considered "the era of public glass", a time when "the new production of mass-produced reflections" in public spaces like the department store meant that "one's body can be seen, glancingly, inadvertently, and in discontinuous fragments, reflected back

from the environment in insubstantial replication”.<sup>55</sup> Madame Beck’s school encapsulates issues concerning the uncontrollable visibility of the body in public spaces, despite the fact that it conflates concepts of private and public as both a school and place of residence. For instance, the school is described in terms antithetical to the notion of a ‘private sphere’ and with an emphasis on the transparency and accessibility of glass, suggesting that it is open to the gaze. There are multiple references to “glass-doors” (184,365,468) that act like windows and, in turn, windows like “casements, opening on hinges” (153) that act like doors which gives the space a sense of unnatural permeability. This is furthered by the description of “blindless windows” (296) which imply a lack of privacy. Lucy also makes frequent reference to the conflation of internal and external space as in one instance she describes a door to a schoolroom which “opened into the large berceau” on which “acacia-boughs caressed its panes, as they stretched across to meet a rose-bush blooming by the opposite lintel” (230). Furthermore, a variety of people “come and go here” from the teachers and pupils who “exceeded one hundred in number” to outsiders such as Dr John and even a supposed “nun’s ghost” (532) which haunts the garret.

It is clear to see how through its permeability and fluidity of movement, the pensionnat is intended to act as a microcosm of public life. For Lucy, then, the school poses threats antithetical to those found in the domestic sphere. Indeed, previously the observer of Polly Home’s unnatural domestic labouring and ‘the watcher’ of Miss Marchmont’s isolated suffering, at the school Lucy becomes “an object of [Madame Beck’s] study”, describing how, “she held me under her eye; she seemed turning me round in her thoughts – measuring my fitness for a purpose, weighing my value in a plan” (104). In all the scenes that occur in public spaces throughout the novel, such as the school, the gallery, and the theatre, the reader witnesses not the threat of invisibility that underscores the female experience in the domestic spaces previously considered, but a new threat of excess visibility that carries equally objectifying potential. Indeed, domestic ideology may have outlined female behaviour in the home in the nineteenth century, but public spaces were also governed by a self-regulating force, that of social surveillance. Lucy rarely catches Madame Beck’s gaze, but she notes that “[S]urveillance,’ ‘espionage,’ – these were her watch-words” (99) as the headmistress moves “ghost-like through the house, watching and spying everywhere” (100) from a position as undetected as her spectral presence suggests.

This stealth-like gaze that is rarely seen but persistently felt supports Michel Foucault’s assertion that the nineteenth century was a time of new social power created through visibility. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault speaks of the regulatory power of “Panopticism”, an “exercise of

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<sup>55</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, pp.1,99.

discipline [that] presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation”.<sup>56</sup> He draws this process of power from the ‘Panopticon’ prison designed in the late eighteenth century by Jeremy Bentham in which inmates are observed by guards from an unseen watchtower. The “major effect of the Panopticon”, Foucault explains, is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”.<sup>57</sup> Applied to social surveillance in societies, Foucault notes that when members of a society believe their behaviour is being observed, they will conform to the behaviours that society dictates. In *Villette*, Brontë uses the self-regulatory effect of panoptic surveillance to explore how the power of the gaze mediates gender roles, in particular the way in which women are seen and act in society.

As we have begun to consider, issues of identity are often explored in relation to spaces in Brontë’s novels, and we have seen thus far how Polly Home is aligned with the Bretton household in order for Lucy to reject ideologies of domestic femininity. It has been comparably noted by critics such as Tony Tanner that, “Madame Beck’s house is curiously similar to Ginevra [Fanshawe’s] character”, due to their shared attraction of the gaze and associations with public display.<sup>58</sup> The way Lucy perceives and narrates Ginevra’s character provides a critique of the effects the self-regulating panoptic gaze of patriarchal society has on women. Ginevra represents a different type of bourgeois femininity to Polly as she reflects the socially mobile middle-class woman who aspires to aristocratic status. The aristocratic woman of leisure was, as Nancy Armstrong explains, antithetical to the bourgeois domestic woman as by locating value in the material body, and by “putting the body on display”, she was seen to deny her own subjectivity through a cultivated passivity and self-objectification.<sup>59</sup> As a bourgeois woman only emulating this behaviour, Ginevra appears doubly vulgar in her self-conscious attempts at ‘putting her body on display’ as a prize commodity for the consumption potential male suitors. As we saw in the introduction, the central anxieties concerning women’s increased physical presence in public spaces were that they would “fluctuate between being objects under the gaze of men” whilst also “being agents of desiring goods on their own”.<sup>60</sup> Ginevra embodies both the anxiety of objectification in her active positioning of her body for public display and the anxiety of unnatural consumption in her desire for commodities.

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<sup>56</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.170.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.201.

<sup>58</sup> Tony Tanner, ‘Introduction’ in Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (Middlesex and New York: Penguin, 1979), pp.7-51 (p.18).

<sup>59</sup> Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p.75.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.66.

For example, Lucy describes Ginevra as a woman who “lived her full life in a ball-room” and who elsewhere “drooped dispirited” (198). She is also depicted as having an insatiable appetite for ‘things’ both through her singular consumption of “creams and ices” and “sweet wine”, which she feeds on “like a humming-bird on honey-paste”, and also through her desire for commodities of “dresses [...] gloves, bouquets, even trinkets” (198) which she requests as gifts from male suitors and from her wealthy, upper-class female chaperon, Mrs. Cholmondeley. These material adornments act as external signifiers of both her class ambition and preoccupation with cultivating aesthetic desirability to attract the male gaze. Indeed, Lucy describes her as “by no means of a refined or elevating character” but exceedingly “pretty” and “charming” (119) looking, locating her worth in the ‘material’ body she constructs. However, in being so preoccupied with her physical appearance, it is suggested that Ginevra threatens to empty herself of subjectivity. Indeed, like Polly Home who is likened to a “cabinet of oddities” (35), a description which implies the commodification of women as objects of display in the home, Ginevra is likened to a “vase” (395), a comparable example of her objectification as an item of aesthetic value but void of internal substance. However, unlike Polly who is too busy serving others to pay attention to her own slowly diminishing presence, Ginevra receives great pleasure in being the object of the gaze, including Lucy’s.

In the first of two scenes where Ginevra asks Lucy, “how do I look?”, Lucy describes how she “viewed her from top to toe. She turned airily round that I might survey her on all sides” (122). That Ginevra performs under the gaze, turning so she may be ‘surveyed on all sides’, reflects her internalisation of the male gaze as she positions herself as an object of the look, rather than a viewing subject. This supports Foucault’s concept of self-regulation as Ginevra’s awareness of the gaze of others throughout the narrative, from Graham Bretton to the Count de Hamal, drives her to construct herself in compliance with patriarchal ideals of desirable femininity. Brontë explores the extent of Ginevra’s internalisation of the male gaze in a symbolic mirror scene when Lucy and Ginevra attend a post-fete ball at the pensionnat. Here Ginevra once again poses the question, “how do I look to-night?”, before adding, “I know I am beautiful; I feel it, I see it—for there is a great looking-glass in the dressing-room [...] Will you go with me now, and let us two stand before it?” (201). It has been suggested by critics such as Kate Flint that post-Lacanian considerations of the mirror as “reflecting back a desirably united, if ultimately illusory, view of the ‘whole’ person” are inaccurate for women.<sup>61</sup> Flint instead draws upon feminist critics such as Susan Stanford Friedman and Lynda Nead who argue that “when a woman looks in a mirror, she sees not isolate selfhood but an image of ‘woman’, a

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<sup>61</sup> Kate Flint, *The Victorians and Visual Imagination* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.236.

member of a social and cultural category".<sup>62</sup> That Ginevra would rather look at her own image in the mirror than survey the social spectacle at the fate like Lucy reveals how she places herself within the 'cultural category' of object for consumption. This is confirmed by Lucy's description: "I stood and let her self-love have its feast and triumph: curious to see how much it could swallow—whether it was possible it could feed to satiety" (202). This comment reflects the double sexual threat posed by women in novel public spaces like the department store in that they represented both consumers and commodities to be consumed. Indeed, this image appears all the more perverse as Ginevra is both the object for consumption and the consumer of her own self-image in the mirror, implying a Narcissus-like self-love.

It is clear that for Ginevra, the mirror is used, as La Belle suggests, "as the stand-in for a man or for male-dominated society in general", a regulating tool through which she self-fashions an image that conforms to society's desired standards.<sup>63</sup> Lucy's position in this scene is unique, though. Her own appearance is drawn into the mirror image as the two women stand by side, but it is Ginevra who looks into the glass to assert that Lucy possesses "no beauty" (203) in comparison to her own. Lucy passes no judgement on the mirror, and instead expresses a fascination with watching Ginevra watch herself. This reflects Lucy's position outside of the oppressive cycle mirror-gazing represents. Certainly, there is something tedious and relentless about Ginevra's self-feasting and a cyclicity to the insatiable process of looking and being looked at she engages in. But Lucy "resists being made a mere trace in the bourgeois mirror", to use Isobel Armstrong's phrase, by evading the objectification made implicit by its oppressive and limiting frame and positioning herself as an outsider, a spectator and commentator on the ways in which society encourages women's self-objectification.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, central to the formation and articulation of Lucy's subjectivity is her position as emitter, rather than object, of the gaze and her rejection of the mirror helps signal this. In *Jane Eyre* the mirror seems to offer what Sally Shuttleworth called "an endlessly retreating centre of self", one that led, by the end of the novel at least, to the sense of Jane being "in control of oneself, and at the centre of one's world", as Beth Newman notes.<sup>65</sup> In *Villette*, the way Lucy avoids centring herself in the mirror and instead takes a marginalised position in relation to mirror-looking also provides a commentary on identity building, although of a different kind. Unlike Jane, Lucy uses the mirror to explore how women's identities are often built around their understanding of the self as a cultural

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<sup>62</sup> Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, p.236.

<sup>63</sup> La Belle, *Herself Beheld*, p.28.

<sup>64</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.245.

<sup>65</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.155., Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p.37.

object rather than an autonomous subject. Lucy's desire to avoid this objectification is then reflected in her narrative positioning as she avoids being 'at the centre of one's world' even in her own first-person account. Through her outward-looking, rather than self-analysing, vision, Lucy constructs for the reader a self defined in relation to her position in the external world. This narration still provides an intimacy and alignment with who she is, but in a way that differs to more traditional ways of narrative storytelling.

Some critics have offered useful insights into the possible effects of Lucy's unique narration, defending it from critics like Heather Glen who considered Lucy, "less shaping subject than helpless object".<sup>66</sup> For instance, Luann Fletcher recognises that in creating a highly subjective narrative point of view Brontë does "[create] a narrator who calls attention to her own unreliability".<sup>67</sup> However, rather than seeing this critically, she argues that in doing so,

Brontë asks us to unsettle our own reliance on unquestioned assumptions about what a narrative of a life should look like and, by extension, to realize that our unquestioned expectations determine how we perceive the life itself.<sup>68</sup>

Certainly, those who criticise Lucy's narration for denying or making difficult their access to the text arguably allow their own critical endeavours to override the aims of the woman writer seeking to accurately and in new ways explore the female experience. Rather than being considered antagonistic, Lucy's aversion to mirror-centrality and her emission of a powerful, outward-looking gaze atypical of a nineteenth century woman can be seen to create a narrative that has been variously described as a "literature of consciousness", a "pivotal (proto)modernist fiction of interiority", and "a pioneer stream-of-consciousness novel".<sup>69</sup> Indeed, it is because the reader is privileged such proximity to Lucy's subjective experience that she appears as if to evade the reader's objective study of her character. Although perhaps frustrating for some, this encourages the critic to question, as Fletcher states, their expectations of what a narrative of life should look like and, perhaps more specifically, their expectations of female narratives and how they are represented.

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<sup>66</sup> Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University press, 2002), p.235.

<sup>67</sup> Luann Fletcher, 'Manufactured Marvels, Heretic Narratives, and the Process of Interpretation in *Villette*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 32:4 (1992), pp.723-746 (p.735).

<sup>68</sup> Fletcher, 'Manufactured Marvels, Heretic Narratives, and the Process of Interpretation in *Villette*', p.735.

<sup>69</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.439., Joseph A. Boone, 'Depolicing *Villette*: Surveillance, Invisibility and the Female Erotics of Heretic Narrative', *NOVEL: A Forum in Fiction*, 6 (1992), pp.20-42 (p.34)., Mark Hennelly, 'The "Surveillance of *Désirée*": Freud, Foucault, and *Villette*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26:2 (1998), pp.421-440 (p.429).

One of the most significant ways Brontë explores Lucy's narrative of consciousness which has not been considered by critics is through her relationship with the mirror. Rather than using the mirror to confirm identity as we saw in *Jane Eyre*, Lucy's response to the mirror demonstrates how her perspective transcends its limiting, centralising frame. There are two main mirror scenes that achieve this, both of which place Lucy in the positions of domestic and public woman respectively. In doing so, Brontë links the rejection of mirror-identification to Lucy's rejection of the roles of domestic and public woman embodied by Polly Home and Ginevra Fanshawe. The first scene occurs after a period of extended isolation at Madame Beck's school when Lucy, having collapsed in a state of mental malady in the streets of Villette, finds herself awakening into "an unknown room in an unknown house" (237). The reader witnesses her confusion when taking in the eerily familiar but apparently foreign environment around her, which eventually reveals to be the material surroundings of her childhood home of Bretton moved now to La Terrasse, Graham Bretton's bachelor manoir in Villette.

Most significantly to this scene, when Lucy awakes in the apartment, she perceives her environment indirectly through its reflection in a pier glass mirror like the one discovered by Jane Eyre in the red room. She describes,

A gilded mirror filled up the space between two windows, curtained amply with blue damask. In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face. It was obvious, not only from the furniture, but from the position of windows, doors, and fireplace, that this was an unknown room in an unknown house. Hardly less plain was it that my brain was not yet settled; for, as I gazed at the blue arm-chair, it appeared to grow familiar, and "auld lang syne" smiled out of every nook [...] Strange to say, old acquaintance were all about me [...] Of all these things I could have told the peculiarities, numbered the flaws or crack, like any *clairvoyante* (237).

As we saw in *Jane Eyre*, seeing 'through a glass, darkly', rather than directly, draws upon the symbolism of the mirror as a tool for alternate vision. Here it is clear that the mirror serves to reflect Lucy's psychological response to finding herself, once again, surrounded by an uncannily *unhomely* reflection of home like the one she first experienced at the Bretton household at the beginning of the novel. We saw through a Foucauldian reading of the pier glass in the red room how the mirror's reflection opens a space for alternative reality. Rather than a 'heterotopia', the pier glass in this scene opens up something more akin to what Hilary Dannenberg refers to as a "cognitive schemata", "a form of visual

portal [...] achieving a three-dimensional sense of space by opening up an inset image of the room”.<sup>70</sup> This is similar to Foucault’s heterotopia, but instead of a physical space it “create[s] a concrete and detailed environment in tandem with the depiction of the cognitive process of recognition”.<sup>71</sup> However, rather than simply depicting the moment of non-recognition and the moment when recollection is achieved, Brontë uses the mirror as a space where remembering is depicted as a process of consciousness, rather than an immediate activity.

This provides an apt example of the narrative of consciousness created in *Villette* as the reader is neither behind nor ahead of Lucy’s cognition, they experience her remembering as it occurs, including her journey from confusion to clarity. Spectral metaphors are aptly drawn upon in this scene to depict this confusion. For instance, Lucy is positioned as a ‘clairvoyante’, one with ‘clear vision’ who must beckon meaning from the phantom furniture which ghostliness reflects its position in her unconscious as a memory-in-limbo, not yet fully brought to life. However, the spectral metaphor does not only signal the transience and temporal fluidity of memory, it also recalls the “small ghost” (44), Polly Home, who haunted the original Bretton interior and thus provides a further critique of the bourgeois domestic family unit. There is an irony, then, to the metaphor of remembering as a spectral process as the memory Lucy recalls from the uncanny, phantom environment at La Terrasse is simply the original uncanny, haunted interiors of Bretton. In other words, the recognition of the phantom interior only brings forth the memory of more of the same thing: ghosts.

More than this, however, the phantom metaphors employed in this scene can be read as Lucy’s criticism of bourgeois values through her criticism of bourgeois space. As this scene occurs after an intense period of isolation and is preceded by a nurturing interaction between Lucy and her recently reunited godmother, it is perhaps clear to see how critics such as Eva Badowska have read this scene as an example of Lucy reconfirming her identity through recollection and reconciliation with family. Indeed, Badowska uses the pincushion which bears the initials of her Lucy’s godmother and which sparks Lucy’s remembering to argue that it functions “not only as a prosthesis of memory but also as an axis around which Lucy’s subjectivity gets reconstituted. Lucy recovers not just the memory of “lost” events but her self identity”.<sup>72</sup> However, Badowska is mistaken to assume that reconciliation with the Bretton family means that Lucy has found herself a home or identity amongst them. Moreover, her reading does not fully account for the clear criticism implied in the spectral descriptions

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<sup>70</sup> Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), pp.77,81.

<sup>71</sup> Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, p.77.

<sup>72</sup> Eva Badowska, ‘Choseville: Brontë’s *Villette* and the Art of Bourgeois Interiority’, *PMLA*, 120:5 (2005), pp.1509-1523 (p.1516).



that signal that whilst Lucy may be able to admire her surrounds, they are not a home for her, as the novel's conclusion confirms. Indeed, Badowska herself reveals this contradiction when she states that although Lucy "locate[s] herself amid the furniture of the parlor, she is concerned throughout the narrative about being reduced to the status of 'unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner's work, and carpets of no striking pattern'".<sup>73</sup> Despite recognising this elsewhere, Badowska does not see how this scene also presents a criticism of the emptied subjectivity of the bourgeois interior.

Indeed, that the seemingly "solid arm-chairs, looking glasses, and washstands" (240) appear to Lucy as merely "ghosts of such articles" (241) reveals that for her, the bourgeois home is irrevocably a dead space, antithetical to what Thad Logan calls the "womb-like bowers of beneficent materiality" the idealised middle-class home was expected to represent.<sup>74</sup> Logan's study on *The Victorian Parlour* addresses the expectation of domestic interiors to reflect taste, respectability, and class ambition in the mid-nineteenth century. However, the resulting commodification of the home was also highly criticised. In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin's study of material culture in nineteenth-century Paris, he uses a similar spectral analogy to Brontë when considering what he referred to as "the horror of apartments", the loss of 'aura' and authenticity amongst the mass-produced materialism of the bourgeois home.<sup>75</sup> Benjamin argues that,

The bourgeois interior of the 1860s to the 1890s – with its gigantic sideboards distended with carvings, the sunless corners where potted palms sit, the balcony embattled behind its balustrade, and the long corridors with their singing gas flames – fittingly houses only the corpse [...] The soulless luxury of the furnishings becomes true comfort only in the presence of a dead body.<sup>76</sup>

The 'lifelessness' of the domestic space was particularly troubling to Benjamin in an age where advancements in the production of commodities was seen to deprive the superfluously furnished Victorian interior of history, authenticity, and the respectability of the artisan product. Carlo Salzini reveals how the materialism of the home was at the centre of Benjamin's criticism as it came to represent a space where "any living thing is expelled, annihilated or murdered by the cult of lifeless

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<sup>73</sup> Badowska, 'Choseville: Brontë's *Villette* and the Art of Bourgeois Interiority', p.1520.

<sup>74</sup> Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p.96.

<sup>75</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press, 1999), p.447.

<sup>76</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Projects*, p.447.

and ageless commodities”, a description which accurately reflects Benjamin’s concerns that objects were overriding the central humanism that define the domestic sphere.<sup>77</sup>

Brontë appears to make a comparable criticism in *Villette*, using the concept of the displaced bourgeois interior, moved from Bretton to La Terrasse but eerily unchanged, as a critique of the stagnant repetition of bourgeois family lineage. Lucy may not be good at telling the reader what it is she wants for herself and her future, or in helping the reader get a sense of the direction her narrative is heading in, but through the proximity they gain to her consciousness through narrative technique, they do get an understanding of what it is she rejects. Lucy’s ultimate disavowal of identification with the bourgeois home and a potential role within it occurs the following day, the morning after the pier glass mirror scene when she awakes in a bedroom to the company of her godmother, Mrs Bretton. Lucy’s godmother embodies all that is good and comforting about the notion ‘home’ and thus what is potentially appealing to Lucy in the idea of a traditional domestic role. However, Lucy describes that, “[T]he difference between her and me might be figured by that between the stately ship cruising safe on smooth seas [...] and the life-boat, which most days of the year lies dry and solitary in an old, dark boat-house” (258). What Lucy is suggesting here is that her godmother’s situation is one of sturdy and reliable comfort, whereas Lucy has known only a life of troubled waters. This metaphor takes on further symbolic significance when Lucy describes the bedroom “like a cove in the sea”, a magical underwater world of “white and pale green, suggestive of foam and deep water” (258). There is, like the phantom parlour, a fantastical element to this space which through the images of a cove and the underwater environment implies womb-like associations. Again, much like the parlour, these have the potential to be comforting, but through Lucy’s subjective gaze and in the contrasting images of ship and lifeboat, the room becomes uncannily threatening and suggestive of potential danger.

In this room Lucy once again finds herself looking towards a mirror, but rather than seeing her own reflection, she describes a “dark, shining glass” that “might have mirrored a mermaid” (259). Mandy Swann has considered Lucy’s interpretation of the bedroom as a further example of her rejection of the bourgeois home based on its display of false refuge as the calm sea cave “associate[s] the Bretton existence with falsity” as the “shelter and hope” experienced there is “temporary and illusory; this sea calm is a betrayer, as is much of the comfort she receives in her life”.<sup>78</sup> This is made most explicit through the image of the mermaid, a siren figure whose deceptive beauty lures impressionable sea-voyagers to their deaths. Jenijoy La Belle notes that historically, mermaids have

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<sup>77</sup> Carlo Salzani, *Constellations of Reading: Walter Benjamin in Figures of Actuality* (Bern: International Academic Publishers, 2009), p.104.

<sup>78</sup> Mandy Swann, “The Destroying Angel of Tempest’: the Sea in *Villette*’, *Brontë Studies*, 38 (2013), pp.145-156 (p.152).

been associated with the hand-mirror whereas mermen are most commonly imaged with the conch. This aligns men with activity and women “with the creation of a purely visual presence [...] they are reflections of masculine desire”.<sup>79</sup> With this in mind, it is perhaps no surprise that when Lucy returns to “my own little sea-green room” some chapters later, she sees Polly Home “before the glass”, “an airy, fairy thing – small, slight, white – a winter spirit” (394). Although not specifically a mermaid, Polly’s adoption of mythological and fairy tale facades throughout the narrative reflects her lack of individuality as she conforms to idealised images of femininity. Moreover, Polly’s appearance in the glass acts to signal her belonging at La Terrasse, foreshadowing her future position as mistress of the house as she marries Graham Bretton. That “[T]he sea cave is not Lucy’s proper home”, as Swann too acknowledges, is confirmed not only by her absence from the mirror but by the fact that Brontë implements sea-imagery throughout the novel to signal Lucy’s isolation and lack of belonging, from her parents death by drowning in a ship wreck at the beginning of the novel to M. Paul’s implied demise in a similar fate at the end.<sup>80</sup>

If the scenes at La Terrasse can be considered to reflect Lucy’s rejection of the bourgeois home and of domestic femininity in the private sphere, then her rejection of the alternative anxieties of bourgeois femininity Ginevra represents as an object of display for the male gaze in the public sphere are made evident when she meets with a mirror at the concert hall. This is the only instance of mirror gazing that occurs in a public or non-domestic space in the Brontës’ novels, and the mirror offers another opportunity for further highlighting Lucy’s narrative of consciousness. Before attending a concert, accompanied by Graham and Mrs. Bretton, Lucy is shocked to discover that her godmother has ordered her a pink dress for the occasion. Lucy fears that its bold, obnoxious colour will make her appear ostentatious: “I do hope [Graham] will not think I have been decking myself out to draw attention” (295). The gown symbolises a desire to be seen in the public, social space of the concert hall that recalls Ginevra’s love of self-embellishment for the signalling of her feminine desirability and aspiring class status previously. The anxiety of being the object of the gaze that Lucy expresses is comparable to the anxieties of uncontrollable public visibility brought on by new reflective glass environments in spaces like the department store. Brontë furthers these similarities through Lucy’s descriptions of the concert hall as “a great illuminated building”, “vast and dazzling”, and her description of a chandelier which is particularly evocative of the bedazzling refraction of light and reflection experienced in such spaces:

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<sup>79</sup> La Belle, *Herself Beheld*, p.143.

<sup>80</sup> Swann, ‘The Destroying Angel of Tempest’: the Sea in *Villette*, p.152.

from the dome, flamed a mass that dazzled me—a mass, I thought, of rock-crystal, sparkling with facets, streaming with drops, ablaze with stars, and gorgeously tinged with dews of gems dissolved, or fragments of rainbows shivered (297).

This description is similar to the “sensuous allure of light and transparency” that Isobel Armstrong accredited to creating a sense of “optical overload” in the mid-century department stores.<sup>81</sup> It is also akin to the intoxication or ‘phantasmagoria’ that Walter Benjamin described as a result of overwhelming commodity fetishism in the urban environment of the arcades.<sup>82</sup>

As Lucy takes in the spectacular environment, she then encounters a mirror which takes her by surprise. She declares,

We moved on—I was not at all conscious whither—but at some turn we suddenly encountered another party approaching from the opposite direction. I just now see that group, as it flashed—upon me for one moment. A handsome middle-aged lady in dark velvet; a gentleman who might be her son—the best face, the finest figure, I thought, I had ever seen; a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantle. I noted them all—the third person as well as the other two—and for the fraction of a moment believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror, filling a compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party. Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the “giftie” of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful; it might have been worse. (298)

Lucy here depicts her response to the novel experience of inadvertent self-reflection in a glass-replete public environment where reflections were newly abounding from unexpected places. As Isobel Armstrong writes, “[R]eflection is now outside one’s control, since no one owns reflections, we do not know *what stranger* might see our own reflection, nor does the object of the gaze know that it has fallen on him or her”.<sup>83</sup> The inconspicuousness of reflection is furthered by the fact that that unlike the domestic mirror which was, until modernism, enclosed by a decorative frame that provided a reassuring limit to reflection, this public mirror is vast and seemingly uncontained, bookended only by pillars which give the impression of it being extended from ceiling to floor.

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<sup>81</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.139.

<sup>82</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.7.

<sup>83</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.99.

Certainly, the size and lack of boundary this mirror possesses highlights the uncontrollable nature of public reflection in the mid-nineteenth century. The idea that this could lead to an unwanted and undetected gaze from a stranger is satirised by the fact that Lucy is both the object of the gaze and, unknowingly at first, the stranger emitting the look. However, similarly to the mirror scene at La Terrasse, we also find here another example of the way Lucy creates a narrative in line with her experience of recollection. As in the phantom parlour, the reader lingers with Lucy in the cognitive process as the image in the mirror is less important in these scenes than the recorded cognitive process of looking and recollecting. Furthermore, this scene also allows Lucy to depict a different way of manoeuvring her position as a female subject in a public space. It should be noted that before the concert when Lucy is encouraged to look in a dressing room mirror she rejects her image and turns away “with some fear and trembling” (295), and yet here the accidental experience of self-reflection allows her the novel pleasure, the ‘giftie’, of seeing herself as another might. This reveals the difference between the sort of narcissistic, self-conscious mirror gazing Ginevra participates in and the suggestion of a more acceptable enjoyment in catching one’s reflection by happenchance. Ultimately, Lucy’s response to her reflection, that she does not indulge in narcissistic self-feasting like Ginevra but coolly acknowledges the novelty of the experience of self-reflection and moves on, confirms the message perpetuated throughout the novel that Lucy does not define the self through physical appearance or through supposedly concrete, external signifiers of identity.

We have thus far considered *Villette*’s criticism of bourgeois femininity from the perspectives of the private and public women, each of whom risk objectification by being either invisible in society or overly visible. Although she is foremost an observer, Lucy experiences herself in both these positions to a certain degree. For instance, her self-described “shadowy” (182) position in society can be compared in a way to the figure of phantom domesticity, Polly Home. Of course, Lucy’s invisibility is different to Polly’s as the latter is still traditionally beautiful and thus desirable, and her inconspicuous status is merely an extension of her adherence to conventional feminine values. Lucy, on the other hand, does desire to be seen, at least not in an objectifying way. For instance, in the domestic scenes, Lucy’s own inconspicuous status is made evident by her initial romantic interest in Graham Bretton which is not reciprocated. Here Brontë demonstrates how women who do not conform to societal standards of beauty become socially and sexually ‘invisible’. As identity is often linked to the notion ‘home’ and belonging in the novel, domestic metaphors are employed to explore this. For instance, Lucy describes how, in Graham’s mind, she occupied “just that degree of notice and consequence a person of my exterior habitually expects: that is to say, about what is given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner’s work, and carpets of no striking pattern” (135). Lucy does not stand out to Graham as a subject, but her lack of sexual appeal turns her into a

common-place object. Graham continues to perceive Lucy as being “inoffensive as a shadow” (482), “a neutral, passive thing” (144), barely noticeable in comparison to the bourgeois beauties that oppose her, Polly and Ginevra.

On the other hand, at Madame Beck’s school Lucy experiences the alternative frustration and even humiliation of being always and unknowingly the object of the gaze. Madame Beck’s surveillance reflects the unseen but ever-present gaze of patriarchal society, forcing Lucy to hide and mediate her behaviour as she conceals her desire by locking up and burying her letters and seeks solace in feminine spaces like the garden. For Lucy, then, it appears that confirming her status as subject will require mediating a correct level of visibility that allows her to assert her autonomy in society whilst avoiding objectification. Ruth Robbins has argued that Lucy’s understanding of “the economy of the look” means that she is both aware of the objectifying potential of the male gaze, whilst also understanding that society has no equal value system for women outside of beauty through which she can compensate.<sup>84</sup> Robbins argues that Lucy responds to this by seeking to “negotiate a subject position for herself in which she can be the gazer, since no one looks at her, a subject rather than an object”.<sup>85</sup> However, this only gets her so far in terms of her effectiveness as a subject.

Beth Newman has rightly acknowledged that “discourse on visibility, in studying what is historically specific about vision, tends to equate subjectivity with the position of the observer. But subjectivity emerges equally in the experience of being seen”.<sup>86</sup> She looks at psychological drives such as the Freudian *Schaulust*, “usually translated as *scopophilia* and glossed by Freud as ‘sexual pleasure in looking’”, in invoking the pleasure in being looked at.<sup>87</sup> She also credits the work of Michel Foucault for addressing “the subject on display” and for “placing visual relations on a historical axis”, rather than considering them as “timeless universals” as psychoanalysis encourages.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, we have seen how *Villette* engages with the Foucauldian idea of panopticism and social surveillance through its consideration of new visual relations in glass replete public spaces. However, we have not yet considered scenes where Lucy’s body is put on display for observation from others. What is interesting in *Villette* that these scenes often occur through a dramatization of ‘putting the body on display’, in scenes that take place at a gallery and fete as we will now consider. This allows Lucy to provide a

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<sup>84</sup> Ruth Robbins, ‘How Do I Look? *Villette* and Looking Different(ly)’, *Brontë Studies*, 28:3 (2003), pp.215-224 (p.217).

<sup>85</sup> Robbins, ‘How Do I Look? *Villette* and Looking Different(ly)’, p.217.

<sup>86</sup> Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p.22.

<sup>87</sup> Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p.10.

<sup>88</sup> Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p.22.

critique of her position when being observed whilst also allowing for an element of control that makes the object position less passive and therefore less objectifying.

In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey famously identified that, "[I]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female".<sup>89</sup> She notes how women have traditionally been represented as to be "looked at and displayed", with scopic pleasure being most commonly male directed and male derived.<sup>90</sup> Brontë challenges the traditional position for women as 'object of display' in a scene before the concert when Lucy visits a gallery and surveys images of women painted by men. The two images she surveys in detail depict women in a stereotypically male-imagined Madonna-whore dichotomy. The first is a large painting of the Cleopatra who Lucy describes as "extremely well fed", a "commodity of bulk" sexualised by the "affluence of flesh" on display, barely concealed by "inefficient raiment" (285). This woman can be seen to mirror Ginevra Fanshawe's character as both present images of women put on display for the consumption of a, namely male, audience. These two depictions of commodified femininity share further similarity in their framing, Ginevra being so often framed by the mirror and the Cleopatra framed as a painting in the gallery. As the mirror acts as a stand in for the dominant male gaze of society, encouraging Ginevra's conformity to masculine ideals of femininity, so does the painting depict a comparable 'reflection' of a woman framed through the lens of male desire. In her position firmly outside the frames, Lucy resists becoming 'a mere trace in the bourgeois mirror' and asserts herself as director of the look, thus adopting a dominant subject position usually assumed by the male.

With the introduction of M. Paul Emmanuel, a fellow teacher at Madame Beck's school, to this scene, the reader is presented with male resistance to the woman who attempts to assert an alternative position in the scopic relationship. M. Paul is particularly significant here because, as we will shortly see, he later becomes Lucy's love interest. At first, upon entering the gallery he shows concern with Lucy being unaccompanied as his exclamation of shock posed as a question reveals, "You are not alone?" (286). As John Paul Kanwit states, "[M]iddle-class women became the largest single group of gallery visitors during the Victorian period, a fact that heightened the anxiety that they would be exposed to the male view".<sup>91</sup> However, M. Paul's concern for Lucy's potential vulnerability as object of the gaze merely masks his true issue with her adopting a powerful and agentic gaze of her own. Certainly, Lucy makes sure to assert that she is not merely a passive viewer of the images at the gallery but an active critic as she declares, "I was happy; happy, not always in admiring, but in examining,

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<sup>89</sup> See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p.11.

<sup>90</sup> Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p.11.

<sup>91</sup> John Paul Kanwit, *Victorian Art Criticism and the Woman Writer* (Ohio: Ohio State University, 2013), p.257.

questioning, and forming conclusions” (283). Furthermore, the fact that she notes that the images are “very well executed” (284) but still condemns them for their thematic concerns demonstrates that her critique is not technical but cultural; she is seeking to draw attention to the issue of female representation as depicted through the male gaze.

However, this position is met with resistance by M. Paul who deems her viewing of the Cleopatra inappropriate: “[H]ow dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at that picture?” (297). M. Paul’s reference to a ‘garçon’ reveals his opinion that certain works of art are only suitable for viewing by men, and so by directing Lucy to the images of the ‘La vie d’une femme’ he attempts to control what she consumes as a representation of femininity in which to mirror. This series of images depict a woman’s life in the stages of young woman, wife, and mother, reflections of a traditional, idealised female life that can be seen to mirror that of Polly Home. Lucy finds these women “[A]s bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers” (288), reflecting her critique of Polly and Ginevra as contrasting but equally uninspiring depictions of bourgeois femininity. Rejecting the images of ‘La vie d’une femme’, Lucy mocks M. Paul’s attempts at correcting her vision by declaring, “[I]t impossible to keep one’s attention long confined to these masterpieces, and so, by degrees, I veered round, and surveyed the gallery” (288), and thus asserts for herself what is worthy of study. This freedom of movement also reveals that Lucy feels comfortable in the space, she does not try to make herself invisible as she usually does. This suggests that she does not mind if her body is potentially on display if she herself holds an assertive gaze and can counteract that position as subject.

Despite his faults, M. Paul plays an important role in the constitution of Lucy’s subjectivity as unlike other male characters such as Graham Bretton, M. Paul sees Lucy. At first this appears to present a comparable, albeit contrasting, threat to the “blind[ness]” (428) of Graham Bretton as M. Paul embodies an objectifying and censoring patriarchal gaze. Indeed, Joseph Boone has noted the similarities between Madame Beck and M. Paul by revealing how they both occupy a panoptic position, a “summit of observation” (160) and “post of observation” (526) respectively, from which they spy on the occupants of the school, and are both likened to ‘Bonaparte’ due to their desire for power and leadership.<sup>92</sup> However, Beth Newman has argued that M. Paul’s gaze is not one of panoptic surveillance as his objects of study are not aware that they are being watched and thus cannot self-regulate.<sup>93</sup> His gaze therefore offers a much more personal threat, and this is reflected in Lucy’s differing response. As Margaret Shaw notes, Lucy often meets Madame Beck’s surveillance with

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<sup>92</sup> Boone, ‘Depolicing Villette: Surveillance, Invisibility and the Female Erotics of Heretic Narrative’.

<sup>93</sup> Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p.49.



feelings of amusement, “[W]hat Lucy objects to is the secretive nature of such observation, not the observation itself”, as “she understands the wisdom of trying to determine a person's moral character through the reading of surface detail”, regardless of how inaccurate a tactic this may reveal to be.<sup>94</sup> M. Paul's gaze, on the other hand, is far more threatening as he uses it in an attempt to study, control and dictate female representation.

M. Paul reveals his thoughts on women's place in society when he declares a “woman of intellect” to be “a luckless accident [...] wanted neither as wife nor worker” (513) and reveals his opinion that women should be either like Ginevra Fanshawe, “[B]eauty anticipated her in the first office”, or like Polly Home, “[H]e believed in his soul that lovely, placid, and passive feminine mediocrity was the only pillow on which manly thought and sense could find rest” (513). He then tries to use his gaze to forcefully regulate female behaviour which deviates from these ideals. Indeed, we learn that M. Paul considers himself an expert student of “female human nature” (526) as he uses a mirror to spy into the garden from his “post of observation” (526) inside the school. Threatened by Lucy's refusal to conform to typically feminine behaviours, M. Paul makes her aware of his gaze, stating, “[Y]ou need watching, and watching over”, the aim being to encourage change in her unfeminine conduct as he states, “[Y]ou want so much checking, regulating, and keeping down” (526). As M. Paul uses a mirror as a literal tool for spying on women, it strengthens its associations as a ‘stand-in for a man or for male-dominated society in general’, as La Belle suggests. However, there is an unavoidable positive element to M. Paul's gaze in that he sees Lucy in a way that others, such as Graham Bretton, do not. Indeed, at the same time he tells her she needs ‘checking, regulating, and keeping down’, he also states, “Je crois voir en je ne sais quoi de rayonnante, petite ambitieuse” [I believe I see something radiant in you, little ambitious] (215). As this statement reveals, M. Paul recognises Lucy's potential, the dim but present ‘radiance’ implied by her name, evocative of ‘lucid’ or ‘light’, that others overlook.

Like most of Brontë's heroes, M. Paul thus begins as an example of oppressive aspects of patriarchal society, but he then goes through a transformation to make him a suitable romantic match for the heroine. Whilst it might be frustrating for the reader, this allows Brontë to both critique patriarchal society and offer optimistic examples for its reformation, often whilst highlighting the strength and virtues of her persevering heroine. The gallery scene demonstrates how M. Paul tries and fails to control the power and direction of Lucy's visual ‘look’, but in a comparable scene during the school fete we see how he attempts to control her physical ‘look’ also. During the school fete, M.

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<sup>94</sup> Margaret Shaw, ‘Narrative Surveillance and Social Control in *Villette*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 34:4 (1994), pp.813-833 (p.815).

Paul coerces Lucy into participating in a play where she is given “a disagreeable part—a man's—an empty-headed fop's” (187). He attempts to assert control over her body, first by locking her like “a species of tyrant and Bluebeard” in the school's garret amongst the “rats”, “beetles” and “cobwebs” (188) to learn her lines. He then denies her food for a long period, before leading her to the kitchen where he “almost forced upon me more than I could swallow” (191). Finally, M. Paul tries to make Lucy wear the attire of a man for the part.

As the lead up to the play shows Lucy stripped of her agency and seemingly at the will of M. Paul, the reader might expect the play to cause Lucy great embarrassment. However, she transforms her performance into an agentic experience where despite being on stage, she is able to assert herself as a subject rather than object. For instance, she delights in playing a romantic interest to Ginevra's character as she finds real opportunity to compete with Graham Bretton in the audience. Recognising that Ginevra is acting toward Graham in the audience, Lucy “acted as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer” Ginevra's affection, describing her “longing” and “relish” to “eclipse” (196) Graham's position. On the one hand, Lucy's role suggests that certain freedoms in looking, particularly possessing a desiring look, are acceptable only to men, or those playing the part of a man. On the other hand, this is complicated by the fact that she does not conform wholly to a male image. Rather, she adopts a combination of male and female dress for the role: “[R]etaining my woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed, in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat” (194). This suggests that Brontë wanted to do more than simply have her protagonist access power through typically masculine means.

Gilbert and Gubar have noted that by adopting a masculine veil, Lucy “reminds us of all those women artists who signal their artistic independence by disguising themselves as men”, much like the Brontë sisters did by adopting the male pseudonyms under which they published.<sup>95</sup> Whilst this allowed the Brontës to signal ‘artistic independence’, just as it allows Lucy a heightened level of autonomy and power, it can also be seen, as Joseph Litvak writes, as “grimly expressive of the ambitious woman's confinement to male impersonation”, a reminder of what women were unable to achieve due to the social limitations of their sex.<sup>96</sup> Lucy's experience acting the part of the male fop is both freeing whilst also being reflective of the limitations of her own gender. Furthermore, this cross-dressing can be seen as a resistance to categorisation altogether and symbolic of Lucy's wider desire to be able to exist as an agentic and self-serving subject without having to do so through an adopted male position or by risking objectification as a woman. Christina Crosby provides a useful interpretation of the non-

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<sup>95</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.413.

<sup>96</sup> Joseph Litvak, ‘Charlotte Brontë and the Scene of Instruction: Authority and Subversion in *Villette*’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 42:4 (1988), pp.467-489 (p.473).

conformity of Lucy's acting as she links it to other images of doubling in the text, such as mirrors and the unveiling of the nun, symbols which she suggests "never entirely come to rest in the text".<sup>97</sup> The result of this, Crosby argues, is that these inconclusive images are used to depict a feminist resistance to the binaries of gender identity. However, this does not work in the same way as the collapsing of doubling in *Jane Eyre* which shows similarity rather than difference. Rather, Crosby notes how the play-acting allows for the paradoxical depiction of "the striking story of Lucy's self-discovery, while also dramatizing that Lucy has no essence to assume".<sup>98</sup> Indeed, Lucy refuses to fully conform to either the feminine or masculine, yet she is still successful in asserting herself as subject. The notion of performing is aptly representative of the narrative of consciousness she depicts as performance is reflective of a process; it depicts the subject in motion, the subject coming into being, rather than signalling the static representations of female identity that Polly, Ginevra, and the women in the gallery are confined to by their respective frames, be them physical or ideological.

Despite Lucy's overcoming of M. Paul's controlling attempts and the successful assertion of a powerful and subversive subjectivity in this scene, it is still necessary for M. Paul to alter his conservative vision if he is going to make Lucy a suitable romantic match. As Margaret Shaw acknowledges, "the tyrant master must be domesticated into the feminized and loving equal".<sup>99</sup> Shaw notes Brontë's feminisation of M. Paul in the shift in his attention from "blustering censorship to his shy offer of friendship and his concern over Lucy's spiritual well-being", which she sees reflected in his developing tenderness towards plants and animals. However, Brontë employs a metaphor for forcefully altered vision to demonstrate that, in the battle of the gaze which has defined the gender power struggle between the two, it is Lucy who succeeds in altering M. Paul's oppressive and patriarchal vision. In a scene comparable to the blinding of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, Lucy accidentally breaks M. Paul's glasses. The glasses are a clear symbol for M. Paul's conservative vision which Lucy describes as "peculiar" and "not easily fitted" (472), implying the difficulty she faces in altering it. Nevertheless, by breaking his glasses, even 'accidentally', she symbolically highlights her triumph in the battle of the gaze and M. Paul is forced to adopt, quite literally, a new way of seeing.

To what extent Charlotte Brontë imagined Lucy Snow and Monsieur Paul successfully paired is made ambiguous by the novel's ending. Initially, M. Paul offers Lucy a sign of his affection by providing her with a school of her own attached to a home where they intend to reside together. Lucie Armitt and Anita Levy are amongst critics that have noted the division of the space between public

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<sup>97</sup> Christina Crosby, 'Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 24:4 (1984), pp.701-715 (p.703).

<sup>98</sup> Crosby, 'Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text', p.714.

<sup>99</sup> Shaw, 'Narrative Surveillance and Social Control in *Villette*', p.829.

(school) and private (domestic), and the uncanny treatment of the domestic space by comparison. For instance, Lucy describes the house as “very tiny”, noting its “delicate walls”, “small round table”, “little couch” and “porcelain on the shelves” (700). As Armitz notes, “M. Paul has procured her a doll’s house”, suggesting that he “hopes Lucy will ‘play house’ with him”, yet the description of the house recalls Bretton and Polly Home, the uncanny, doll-like figure of phantom domestic femininity Lucy encountered there.<sup>100</sup> Like the grotesquely enlarged interior of Bretton, this doll-space feels comparably eerie through its miniature completeness; it is, as Levy states, “static and lifeless [...] so overdetermined as to negate the possibility of the existence of a woman within [...] it is a room to be looked at not lived in”.<sup>101</sup> The home attached to the school could thus be seen to represent the oppressive, matrimonial tie that comes with M. Paul’s gift of financial and intellectual freedom for Lucy.

On the other hand, the miniature size of the space could also be considered a foreboding of Lucy’s future living there alone. There is certainly a feminine, vaginal quality to the descriptions of walls “tinged like a blush” (700) which, alongside the excess of plants and flowers evoking the feminine garden at the school, implies the absence of masculine influence made plausible by the novel’s implied ending. Indeed, Brontë has her hero meet an ambiguous end when he journeys overseas, but one that is suggestive of his demise in a shipwreck. Elizabeth Gaskell claimed that Charlotte’s father, Patrick Brontë, was opposed to a macabre ending and requested that her novel conclude, appropriately for women’s fiction at the time, in marriage.<sup>102</sup> Apparently already anticipating M. Paul’s death, Gaskell wrote that, “all [Charlotte] could do in compliance with her father’s wish was so to veil the fate in oracular words, as to leave it to the character and discernment of her readers to interpret her meaning”.<sup>103</sup> There is a clear thematic consistency to suggest that M. Paul does indeed perish at sea, not only in that it follows the seafaring images and metaphors Brontë employs throughout the narrative, but that it provides a cyclicity to Lucy’s journey which begins with the death of her parents in a shipwreck when she is just a young girl. This cyclicity does not, however, serve to provide a sense of conclusion; it does not, as in *Jane Eyre*, rewrite the misfortunes and injustices of the heroine’s beginnings. Rather, it is a defiance of conclusiveness in keeping with Brontë’s refusal to conform to fixed concepts of identity, particularly, as we have seen, in relation to women’s gendered identity.

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<sup>100</sup> Lucie Armitz, ‘Haunted Childhood in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 32 (2002), pp.217-228 (p.223).

<sup>101</sup> Anita Levy, ‘Public Spaces, Private Eyes: Gender and the Social Work of Aesthetics in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 22:3 (2000), pp.391-416 (p.410).

<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London & New York: Penguin, 1997).

<sup>103</sup> Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p.392.

Unlike *Jane Eyre*, the ending of *Villette* is less willing to conform to expectations. By having Lucy seemingly end where she began in terms of her social status, alone and uncertain of her future, there is a lack of traditional development. This could be read as a liberating open-endedness, Brontë's defiance against neatly wrapping up her protagonist's story, something she satirises further in the ending of *Shirley*. What this allows is for the reader to imagine more options for women outside of the predestined marital and domestic roles society dictated for them; but it also challenges the notion that a woman's life story need ending or finite conclusion at all. Most significantly, this sense of cyclicity or return, combined with the fact that the novel offers little in the way of conclusion or the tying up of storylines, is in keeping with the narrative of consciousness Brontë creates. She has, after all, been from the very beginning concerned with providing intimate psychological insight into her protagonist's experience of being in the world, particularly the public world. The result has been an experiential narrative filled with a sense of sensory, particularly visual, overload and movement, but one that, unlike *Jane Eyre*, is less concerned with destination and more interested in process.

In a recent essay, Jungah Kim reads Lucy's as a "nomadic narrative" in which "the subject is nomadically conscious of the world they are in" and thus has the power to write and rewrite their story as it progresses.<sup>104</sup> Kim considers this to be in opposition to the traditional linear journey of the hero narrative that Georg Lukács's defined in, *The Theory of the Novel*, as "nomadic narrative uses a non-linear form of narration".<sup>105</sup> This provides a useful way of considering the narrative's sense of directionless as in nomadic narrative nothing, including identity, is "subsumed into a singular characterization", and this creates opportunity for recreation and, perhaps most importantly to the conclusion of this narrative, opportunity.<sup>106</sup> Kim's essay certainly provides a fresh way of thinking about our expectations of 'good' narratives as linear and concluding, and yet *Villette* still seems to work against any attempts to order it, even one's that find a way to theorise and accept its non-traditionalism like Kim's. Christina Crosby rings most true with her original assertion that the text presents numerous "oppositions without resolutions", acting as a microcosm for the way the narrative builds up a sense of symbolic potency only to reveal very little definitive meaning and lead to nowhere in particular.<sup>107</sup> Crosby adopts what she considers as the central metaphor of the veiled nun to explore this, a figure of myth who haunts the school and the narrative with mystery and potential meaning but who is eventually unveiled to reveal nothing of great significance. This is strikingly different *Jane*

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<sup>104</sup> Jungah Kim, 'Nomadic Narrative in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', *Humanities*, 8:2 (2019), pp.1-14 (p.2).

<sup>105</sup> Kim, 'Nomadic Narrative in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', p.2.

<sup>106</sup> Kim, 'Nomadic Narrative in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', p.6.

<sup>107</sup> Crosby, 'Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text', p.703.

*Eyre* in which the novel's symbolism and doubly is deeply significant to Jane's own identity and to her narrative progress.

Yet as Crosby goes on to declare, in *Villette* the absence of inherent or profound significance behind the signs reflects the narrative's resistance to conforming to the reader's expectations that the text will hand over meaning or moral conclusion. The point for Crosby seems to be that "Lucy has no essence to assume, no 'proper place' which awaits her. Behind the veil is - nothing".<sup>108</sup> However, more than the nun's veil, it is the mirror that provides the most consistent metaphor for witnessing how the text refuses to comply with expectation. After all, the mirror is linked to Lucy's narrative perspective in a way the nun's veil is not. As we have considered, mirror scenes offer some of the most explicit examples of Lucy's narrative of consciousness. Furthermore, the mirror is a more encompassing metaphor for reveal why Brontë resists the conformation of meaning in the first place. As we saw in the introduction, mirrors dramatise ways of seeing, and despite the fact that *Villette* is a novel that looks at tensions between multiple perspectives, (particularly between traditional male and subversive female, as we have seen), the mirror always brings us back to the fact that the narrative is ultimately always aligned with Lucy's way of seeing. The irony is that Lucy's way of seeing cannot be successfully understood in relation to mirror vision at all. The mirror might allow Lucy to focus on and examine other female characters through which the reader can then attempt to negatively construct a sense of her identity, but this technique dramatises Lucy's position on the margins of the reader's own vision. Lucy avoids potentially reductive perspectives by avoiding classification. This is best indicated in the cross-dressing scene at the fete, but it is also explored in scenes where Lucy's physicality is put on display, like in the gallery scene, in which we see her resist the traditional female position as object of the gaze by asserting herself as an agentic gazing subject. Thus whilst Lucy feels, at least to the reader, to be almost peripheral in the way she makes it difficult to 'pin down' who she is, she is also at the same time everywhere in the text, her vision is central and cannot be escaped in this deeply psychological, subjective, first person narrative.

In both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, a vision outside of the traditional framework is necessary to self-exploration and self-representation, and both narrative perspectives are made evident through the relationship with the mirror. But whilst *Jane Eyre* takes control of the mirror and subverts its traditional meaning to achieve autonomy and subjectivity through the centralising of the self, Lucy Snowe avoids being the central object of the gaze in order to prioritise an experiential narrative perspective, one that has been considered "radical" in its refusal to conform.<sup>109</sup> As we will see in the

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<sup>108</sup> Crosby, 'Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text', p.714.

<sup>109</sup> Crosby, 'Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text', p.715.

following chapters, the restructuring and even evasion of the centralising 'frame' is central to the works of Emily and Anne Brontë also. Moving on to second chapter, I will consider how in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë reveals a comparably subversive power through the marginalisation of her female protagonist. However, rather than the mirror, Emily utilises the window and its association with the ghost to explore and challenge the traditional female social and narrative role.

## CHAPTER 2

### WOMEN, WINDOWS, AND REBELLION IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

*Wuthering Heights* is commonly remembered as a tragic romance novel following the tyrannical revenge plot of Heathcliff, an out-cast foundling, spurred by the untimely death of his childhood sweetheart and “life” and “soul” (204), Catherine Earnshaw.<sup>1</sup> Summaries and synopses regularly focus on this, the main or ‘central’ narrative of the text, and few would privilege a description of the novel that properly acknowledges its primary narrator, Mr. Lockwood, a gentleman from London who takes up residence at Thrushcross Grange where he inherits the brutal love story from the house-keeper and second narrator, Nelly Dean. The exclusion of Lockwood and Nelly’s roles from immediate association with the narrative could be considered a successful implementation of framing devices which “give themselves to setting off central artefacts”, yet are themselves “meant to be forgotten”.<sup>2</sup> However, whilst the narrative frame may act “as little more than a preliminary passage” in some novels, critics of *Wuthering Heights* have long noted the powerful influence of its narrators’ written and verbal accounts which are interwoven throughout the text to shape and even obscure the reader’s perception of events.<sup>3</sup>

For instance, it has been suggested that in this “consciously literary” text which is “at times almost obsessively concerned with books and with reading”, the primary narrator Lockwood acts as “the reader’s vicarious representative in the novel”.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as an outsider to *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood navigates the space eager for explanation of its occupants’ narrative histories and in search for clues that may reveal its secrets, much like a reader presented with *Wuthering Heights* as a text. Yet as Joseph Hillis Miller argues, Lockwood often crucially “gets it wrong” when attempting to interpret his surroundings as Brontë utilises the first three chapters of her novel, before the commencement of the ‘central’ Catherine/Heathcliff narrative, as a warning to over-assertive readers “of how not to do it, of how not to do things with signs”.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Naomi Jacobs has considered

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. by Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack (Oxford & London: Oxford University Press; The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of the Brontës: 1976). All subsequent references to the text will be taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup> John T. Matthews, ‘Framing in *Wuthering Heights*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 27:1 (1985), pp.25-61 (p.25).

<sup>3</sup> Matthews, ‘Framing in *Wuthering Heights*’, p.26.

<sup>4</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.58., J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.58.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.68.



Lockwood's role as Brontë's critique of the 'legitimising' frame narrator which is a common feature of Gothic novels.<sup>6</sup> She sees Lockwood as presenting an outwardly trustworthy, rational male perspective through which the reader is meant to gain access to the female domestic tale at the centre of the novel, but which Brontë ultimately undermines as Lockwood does not provide clarity, but rather misinterprets and obscures the readers access to meaning.

Indeed, Lockwood's incompetence as an interpreter or as 'the reader's vicarious representative' is made evident as soon as he arrives at Heathcliff's abode. As a visitor from the city unacquainted with rural life, he arrives with a set of pre-existing social codes and expectations which quickly fail him in "a situation so completely removed from the stir of society" (3). On entering he finds the house to be "without any introductory lobby or passage" and recalls "observ[ing] no signs of roasting, boiling, or baking" (5) that would signal domestic plenitude. Faced with an absence of familiar signs he is quick to project his own idealised image of the landlord as, "a homely, northern farmer, with stubborn countenance", only to find Heathcliff an enigma, a man of "singular contrast to his abode" (6). This is furthered in a following scene where Lockwood's misreading of the sharp-tongued Catherine Heathcliff as the genteel lady of the house is reflected in a comical encounter with what he perceives to be a litter of kittens, but which is promptly revealed to be nothing but "a heap of dead rabbits" (13). Brontë uses humour to mock her narrator's naivety and draw attention to his incompetence as a reader of his environment. As the reader's 'vicarious representative', Lockwood's initial blunders act as a warning to the reader that conventional methods of reading and interpretation may fail them when approaching this text.

Despite the tempestuous weather, the gate locked against him, and an attack from a pack of Heathcliff's dogs, Lockwood continues to ignore the signs of hostility a good Gothic reader would recognise and persists in his attempts at explicating the Heights. Once inside Heathcliff's abode, Brontë continues to draw parallels between Lockwood's physical experience of the house and the reader's experience of the narrative. Forced to spend the night due to rough weather, Lockwood is led to an eerily uninhabited bedroom where he retires within a strange casement bed described as a "large oak case" which "formed a little closet" against "the ledge of a window, which it enclosed" (23). The physical space around him further reflects the written text as he reads the various names of Catherine Earnshaw/Linton/Heathcliff "scratched on the paint" of "the [window] ledge" (23), which then lead him to some books scrawled with marginalised diary entries: "scarcely one chapter had escaped a pen-and-ink commentary" (24). The "detached sentences" of the diary appear to Lockwood

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<sup>6</sup> Naomi M. Jacobs, 'Gendered and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 16:3 (1986), pp.204-219.

like “faded hieroglyphs” he must “decipher” (24), imbuing the scene with a sense of symbolic potency whilst positioning Lockwood as a hopeful translator of meaning. However, as the names on the window ledge appear to him as “a glare of white letters [...] as vivid as spectres” (24), they appear to taunt Lockwood with their spectral ambiguity and highlight his inability to un-‘lock’ their meaning, as his name suggests. He then falls asleep without uncovering the secrets of the transcripts.

Lockwood’s confusion is reflected in the first of two dreams he experiences. Dreaming of religious persecution, the confusing and illogical numbers of the “*four hundred and ninety nine parts*” of the sermon of “Seventy Times Seven” (27) he endures reflects the muddle of cryptic clues and signs he is met with at Wuthering Heights but which he is unable to decipher. This dream can be taken as an example and perhaps a forewarning of the way the text offers, as Miller argues, “abundant material inviting interpretation”, turning the reader into a type of “detective”, but which ultimately fails to disclose its meaning.<sup>7</sup> Lockwood then experiences a second dream. Here we witness his attempts to stifle the apparent tapping of a fir bough branch at his casement bed window, only to enclose upon “the fingers of a little ice-cold hand” (30) belonging to the ghost of Catherine Earnshaw whose name and diaries Lockwood had been reading shortly before. As the ghost demands, “[L]et me in—let me in!” (30), Lockwood resists by taking its arm and “rub[bing] it to and fro” on “the broken pane” of the window (31). Due to its graphic nature, this interaction has been interpreted as a precedent of masculine brutality in the text. As Isobel Armstrong argues, Lockwood, “[A] fascinated voyeur on Heathcliff and the Heights [...] punches his way through the glass barrier to make an assault” on the ghost Catherine.<sup>8</sup> However, Armstrong’s description of Lockwood ‘punch[ing] his way through the glass barrier’ feels more aggressive than the clumsy, “knocking [his] knuckles through the glass” (30), that Brontë describes, especially when considering the author’s commitment to developing her narrator as a unthreatening “dandy” figure, “feeble as a kitten” (39).<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, although Lockwood’s act is undoubtedly violent, what is made most evident here is not male brutality but the extent of male fear. As Heather Nelson exclaims, Lockwood’s “frenzied scraping of the waif’s wrist across the broken glass of the window reveals the depth of his fear of what such an intrusion could represent”.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the threatening power of the ghost and her frantic desire to ‘get in’ to the Heights creates such a forceful image in this scene that John Matthews, in his essay

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<sup>7</sup> Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.42,43.

<sup>8</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University press, 2008), p.129.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Schorer, ‘Fiction and the “Matrix of Analogy”’, *The Kenyon Review*, 11:4 (1949), pp.539-560 (p.545).

<sup>10</sup> Heather Neilson, ‘The face at the window’: Gothic Thematics in *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Turn of the Screw*, *Sydney Studies in English*, 19 (1993), pp.74-87 (p.81).

on narrative framing in the novel, mistakenly refers to “Catherine’s breaking of the windowpane”.<sup>11</sup> This is revealing of the way power is implied in this scene. Certainly, if we think about the lead up to Lockwood’s dream, the names of Catherine, ‘vivid as spectres’, and the way they lead him to the diary which then influences his dream are suggestive of a type of spell set to resurrect Catherine. To return to Nelson’s suggestion that the scene reflects ‘the depth of his fear of what such an intrusion could represent’, this scene clearly forewarns of Catherine’s intrusion on the text and her disruptive influence, as well as signalling the ineffectuality of the frame narrator.

In this scene, the window is associated with Lockwood as the novel’s frame narrator, the reader’s figurative ‘window’ into the text. In his physical and textual position Lockwood is charged with what information ‘gets in’ much like the delineating boundary of the window which regulates what is visually and physically accessible. Lockwood’s position on the inside of the window implies his assumed proximity to narrative events and reflects the space he is supposed to govern over; one that is, like the house, a space of assumed order and rationality. The ghost Catherine on the other hand is outside the window, a space of narrative uncertainty that contains those symbols and events which have yet to pass through Lockwood’s window of vision but that he is unable to order or decipher. This is represented by the fir bough that in fact reveals to be an arm and by the disarrangement of narrative time, the past, present and future that has yet to be ordered through Lockwood’s story-telling but which the ghost defies by signalling the collapsing of linear time, possessing “a child’s face” yet referring to herself by the marital name of her adult years, “Catherine Linton” (31). The battle between Lockwood and the ghost Catherine at the threshold and the subsequent smashing of the window reveals to the reader the fundamental weakness of the frame narrator. It also foreshadows the power of the ghost in defying physical and narrative boundaries. For instance, in Lockwood’s dream he describes how he “hurriedly piled” up books against the broken window in an attempt to keep the ghost out, but “the pile of books moved as if thrust forward” (31) by Catherine. Furthermore, by arriving to Lockwood in death before he has even encountered her in life through Nelly’s linear storytelling, the ghost Catherine asserts her power to defy attempts at narrative ordering.

This scene becomes an important metaphor for how narrative framing works, or rather fails to work, in the text at large. More than this, though, this scene marks a sort of narrative trauma at the window that the reader and characters relive in various guises throughout the novel. The Gothic as a mode has historic links to trauma. As Steven Bruhm, amongst others, has suggested, “the Gothic itself is a narrative of trauma”.<sup>12</sup> As we saw in the analysis of *Jane Eyre*, this is in part due to the way Gothic

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<sup>11</sup> Matthews, ‘Framing in *Wuthering Heights*’, p.46.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Bruhm, ‘The contemporary Gothic: Why We Weed It’, in Jerrold E. Hogle ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.259-276 (p.268).

narratives have been considered to repeat the same traumatic themes over and over without resolve.<sup>13</sup> Not only has repetition been considered “the major persistent preoccupation of the Gothic”, but it is also a defining feature of trauma.<sup>14</sup> As trauma expert Cathy Caruth states, “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event”, and to thus constantly remember or relive an event.<sup>15</sup> Rather than providing a linear nesting-box frame narration, the ‘recurring frame’ structure of *Wuthering Heights* moves the reader in and out of the ‘central’ tale to the ‘frame situation’ of Lockwood and Nelly’s story-telling in a way that reminds us, over and over, of their biases and limitations as narrators in a sort of frustrating repetition. This frequently occurs at times that feel disruptive to the narrative flow of events, contradicting Jeffrey Williams’s assertion that “narrative never comes at an inconvenient time or in an inappropriate place”.<sup>16</sup> As we saw in the introduction, Miller proposed that the text leads the reader to an assumed ‘centre’ of meaning through its abundant symbolism only to find themselves “always at the corner or at the blind center of vision, where sight fails”.<sup>17</sup> Although Miller is vague with his language, this frustrated movement creates a traceable pattern which presents itself on both a plot and narrative level. Some critics have seen this as a narrative cyclicity, but it is in more in line with the frustrated repetition of the Gothic trauma narrative.<sup>18</sup>

First, we can see how this pattern is employed in the framing situation to frustrate the reader’s access to information from the central tale. Given Lockwood’s legitimising role as a rational outsider and Nelly’s proximity to the central tale as a marginalised family member, we would expect the frame narration to provide clarity or even relief from the notably stifling and labyrinthine effect of the inner tale. However, we are often returned to the framing situation at moments that bar access to the text. The first break in the central story occurs shortly after Catherine returns to *Wuthering Heights* from her transformative stay at Thrushcross Grange with the Linton’s. After getting into an altercation with Edgar Linton, Heathcliff runs away to hide alone in the garret. Nelly Dean then describes to Lockwood, who then recalls to the reader, how Catherine follows after him, “I heard her voice from within. The

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<sup>13</sup> See Michelle A. Massé, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). For an alternate reading, Catherine Spooner considers the repetition of the Gothic as potentially reformative in Catherine Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p.11.

<sup>14</sup> Eugenia DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.94.

<sup>15</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Balltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Williams, *Theory and The Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition* (Cambridge & New York, Cambridge University Press: 1998), p.111.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.68.

<sup>18</sup> One common interpretation is that the text favours “the cyclical time of nature which binds Catherine and Heathcliff to their beloved moor” and which rules over social constructs of time that Lockwood embodies as a man of the city. See Anne Leslie Harris, ‘Psychological Time in *Wuthering Heights*’, *International Fiction Review*, 7 (1980), pp.112-117 (p.114).

little monkey had crept by the skylight of one garret along the roof, into the skylight of the other, and it was with the upmost difficulty I could coax her out again" (75). The significance of the conversation that takes place here is emphasised by the spatial environment of enclosure and intimacy in the same way that the nesting-box images in the casement bed heightened what Deborah Lutz called the "fever dream intensity" of Lockwood's dream.<sup>19</sup> However, much like when the reader's access to Catherine's diary is cut off by Lockwood's transgression into dream, Nelly prevents the reader from accessing this potentially revelatory moment as she reveals she "let the poor things converse unmolested" (75). This is particularly frustrating given Nelly's meddling tendencies elsewhere in the narrative, yet it supports the way the text has been seen to obscure the "origin" of Heathcliff and Catherine's intense relationship.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, as John Allen Stevenson notes, much of the crucial relationship development between Catherine and Heathcliff takes place beyond the reader's field of vision and as a result, "we do not really know much about why Heathcliff and Catherine come together. It is hard to imagine what they talk about [...] or what they do".<sup>21</sup> It is this lack of origin that Miller attributes to the sense of inscrutability that prevails in criticism of the novel, "[W]hat is lost in the case of *Wuthering Heights* is the "origin" which would explain everything".<sup>22</sup> The implementation of the recurring frame contributes to the enigma surrounding the central story by frequently denying access to certain events and impairing a sense of linear narrative progression. For instance, all that the reader learns of the incident in the garret is that Heathcliff plans to "pay Hindley back" (76) for excluding him, at which point Nelly returns the reader to the situation of the frame by declaring to Lockwood, "I'm annoyed how I should dream of chattering on at such a rate: and your gruel cold, and you nodding for bed!" (76). The reader's access to events is doubly cut off as Nelly then declares, "I will be content to pass to the next summer" (78), re-establishing her tale the following year. A further example can be seen later in the novel where Nelly is given a letter from Heathcliff to deliver to Catherine. As the reader is often denied access to the intimacy of conversation between the two, as in the garret scene or in their formative childhood years spent on the moors where, "[N]ature' fills the void created by the apparent absence of the usually detailed novelistic social context", this letter promises crucial insight into their relationship.<sup>23</sup> However, as Nelly returns with the letter to Thrushcross Grange, the reader is returned

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<sup>19</sup> Deborah Lutz, 'Gothic Fictions in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume 3: The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820-1880*, ed. by John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press: 2012), pp.76-89 (p.76).

<sup>20</sup> Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.68.

<sup>21</sup> John Allen Stevenson, "'Heathcliff is me!': *Wuthering Heights* and the Question of Likeness', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 43:1 (1988), pp.60-81 (p.65).

<sup>22</sup> Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.61.

<sup>23</sup> Stevenson, "'Heathcliff is me!': *Wuthering Heights* and the Question of Likeness', p.66.

to the frame narrative situation due to the arrival of Lockwood's doctor and without learning what information it contains.

The situation that allows for the story telling between Nelly and Lockwood is, as highlighted here, based on Lockwood's recovery from illness. I have noted how the recurring, rather than simply nesting-box, frame narrative creates a frustrating oscillating effect for the reader, but the condition of the story-telling environment must also be considered for the effect it creates, one that mimics the oppressive environment of the central tale and at times even antagonises it. Jeffrey Williams has noted that framing situations "usually take place at some remove, not only in time (which presumably augurs balance and disinterested reflection), but in space, in a comfortable place that fosters the narrating".<sup>24</sup> He also states that such narratives frequently act as a "kind of anaesthesia to illness".<sup>25</sup> However, this is partially true of Lockwood's situation. For instance, he does declare that although the story Nelly tells him is "not exactly of the kind which I should have chosen to amuse me", he will endeavour to "extract wholesome medicines from Mrs. Dean's bitter herb" (188). But due to the way *Wuthering Heights* seems to repeat its traumas, as we will continue to explore, there is little suggestion that it is a healing tale, and the reader is encouraged to question whether the story is less a 'wholesome medicine' for Lockwood and whether it perhaps has a sickening effect on its receptor instead.

First, the story-telling situation does not take place at a time of much 'remove', nor does it take place 'in a comfortable place'. This does not mean that the frame does not provide a 'place that fosters narrating', though. As Roger Luckhurst stresses, "[I]n its shock impact, trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma".<sup>26</sup> In other words, trauma encourages repetition and thus produces narrative, even if it is a narrative of relative sameness and without resolve. Here the framing situation produces narrative by both mimicking the atmosphere of the central tale but also by influencing and being directly influenced by it. For instance, the central tale has what can be considered as a sense of tormenting, arrested time brought on by Heathcliff and Catherine's impossible longing for a return to a past state that cannot be reached. As Lockwood states, "[T]ime stagnates here" (34). Brontë mirrors the central tale's "dismal spiritual atmosphere", which gives Lockwood a feeling of being "buried alive" (16), in the situation of the frame narrative by having Lockwood repeatedly reflect upon his own laboriously slow recovery from illness: "[A] charming introduction to a hermit's life!", he exclaims, "[F]our weeks' torture, tossing and sickness! Oh, these bleak winds and bitter northern skies, and impossible roads, and dilatory surgeons!" (112). Williams states that the time distance of frame narratives usually

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<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Theory and The Novel*, p.101.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Theory and The Novel*, p.111.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2008), p.79.

provides “respite precisely from the implacable tyranny of time”, but in *Wuthering Heights* it only appears to repeat the oppressive sense of time found within the central tale.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, there is a sense throughout the novel that that which haunts the inner narrative also haunts the outer, and this implies a collapsing of distinction between frame and central tale. This is symbolically implied in the initial scene in the box bed where Catherine’s ghost appears to Lockwood before her proper narrative initiation from Nelly. This reinforces the sense that boundaries, both textual and physical, are unstable and potentially threatening in their inability to control what is ‘let in’. Moreover, it should not be overlooked that the situation which created the opportunity for story telling came about from Lockwood’s illness, an illness which was brought on by his stay at *Wuthering Heights* where he was bitten by Heathcliff’s dogs and mentally tormented by Catherine’s ghost. The situation that allows for storytelling is thus directly influenced by the narrator’s proximity to the central tale, further confusing the reader’s search for ‘origin’. Not only does Lockwood’s hostile experience at the Heights reinforce that he is an outsider, that he does not belong in the world of the central tale, but it then prompts the reader’s own concerns over the corruptibility of storytelling due to their proximity to Lockwood as their ‘vicarious representative’. In other words, Lockwood’s inability to uphold narrative boundaries and his subsequent sickening works to suggest that the central tale could indeed have a sickening effect on the reader, also. Of course, both the frame narrators’ proximity to the central tale in both time and space means that they also influence the central narrative themselves. Nelly arguably brings on Catherine’s breakdown by keeping Heathcliff’s letter from her for three days, a letter that may have prevented her from self-destruction. Furthermore, by revealing his interaction with the ghost Catherine to Heathcliff, Lockwood can be said to initiate Heathcliff’s descent into madness which leads to his death. As the broken window metaphor implies, the ineffectual aperture works both ways: it gives Catherine’s ghost, as representative of the central tale, access to Lockwood, as representative of the external narration, and thus gives her the potential to disrupt it. But in doing so, the external narration also has the potential to disorder and disturb the central tale.

It is to the central tale that this analysis will now turn. I have suggested that a narrative trauma occurred in the smashing of the window in Lockwood’s dream that dramatized the ineffectuality of the frame narrative situation which the reader is then drawn back to throughout the text, the result being a frustrating sense of denied access to what Miller referred to as the centre of textual meaning. Whilst we have considered this pattern on narrative level, it is also found in the central tale through Heathcliff’s search for impossible reunion with Catherine. In *Fiction and Repetition*, Miller uses an

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, *Theory and The Novel*, p.111.

economic metaphor to explore Heathcliff's search for Catherine, seeing Catherine as a sort of capital that Heathcliff collects, but one of infinite value and thus of no value at all. He uses this metaphor to explain the redundancy for Heathcliff's search for meaning, which mimics the redundancy of the reader's own search for understanding which the text repeatedly denies. However, I see Catherine's role as a ghost as the text's existing metaphor for this pattern. Indeed, the ghost is both the object that Heathcliff seeks to reunite with to achieve unity and the object that stands for the impossibility of that unity. This is due to the fact that the figure of the ghost stands for what Esther Peeren called a "present absence", a "figure of return" signalling the impossibility of return.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, whereas Miller refers vaguely to 'centre' and 'periphery' in Heathcliff's futile search for meaning, it is clear that the ghost's association with the window provides a physical space for Heathcliff's impossible search from centre to periphery to take place.

The first narrative trauma at the window symbolised the ineffectuality of the frame narration. However, there is a second narrative trauma at the window which we learn about in the central tale, and this goes some way to explaining not the origin of Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship, but the reason for their separation. Indeed, as it is trauma itself, rather than recovery from trauma, that is a central theme of the novel, this is perhaps the closest the reader gets to a significant 'origin' as this early window scene provides the narrative of the original severance Catherine and Heathcliff experience as children. This initial scene of severance occurs when the adolescent Catherine and Heathcliff, on one of their frequent rambles on the moors, decide to pass by Thrushcross Grange and study the domestic situation of the Linton children. The two sit beneath the parlour window and gaze in, initially united in their opposition to the Linton's who they scorn for their bourgeois conformism: "[W]e laughed out right at the petted things; we despised them!" (59). However, moments later Catherine is attacked by the Lintons' dog and is subsequently ushered inside the house to recover. Heathcliff, deemed "quite unfit for a decent house" by Mrs Linton, "resumed [his] station as spy" (62) beneath the window to observe Catherine resting in her elegant new surroundings. From this point onwards, the window becomes a recurring motif for signalling the social and physical divides that separate Catherine and Heathcliff which they never fully recover from. It also sets up a pattern of Heathcliff seeking the window in search of reunion with Catherine, only to be denied access to her.

When Catherine returns to Wuthering Heights she is demonstrably altered, her appearance now marking that of "a very dignified person" (65) closer to the social ranks of the Lintons than the "gypsy" (6) heathen Heathcliff whom was once her sole ally. As a result, tensions between herself and

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<sup>28</sup> Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.10.



Heathcliff begin to build. It is at this point that Nelly breaks from the story and returns to the external narrative situation where she advises Lockwood she will “be content to pass to the next summer” (78), thus depriving the reader of witnessing the extent of their separation and changed relationship dynamic. However, when the narrative resumes, Heathcliff assists the reader in filling in the gaps as he points to an almanack on the wall, “hanging near the window” (86), where he has marked the days Catherine spent between the Grange and the Heights and thus revealing their summer spent apart. The explicit proximity of the calendar to the window reinforces the window as a place of longing and waiting for Heathcliff, recalling that initial scene of separation at Thrushcross Grange whilst also foreshadowing Heathcliff’s numerous visits to the window in search of Catherine later in the narrative.

Although Heathcliff is the original ‘outsider’ at the beginning of the novel, the gender differences that Brontë highlights from the point of their separation leads the reader to question which side of the window, inside or outside, it is better to occupy. Critics like Terry Eagleton have seen Heathcliff’s struggle of upward mobility as the text’s central concern, but Brontë utilises this to highlight female powerlessness by comparison.<sup>29</sup> Thus her real concern with revealing the way gendered society strips women of any access to power or autonomy is revealed in the difference between Heathcliff’s materialisation as a capitalist and Catherine’s de-materialisation as a ghost. For instance, Miller notes that in an attempt at revenge and bringing himself closer to Catherine, Heathcliff sets out to take possession of both people and property. Charles Percy Sanger and Roy De Montpensier Stone’s meticulous studies on the legal aspects of Brontë’s novel have also revealed how the text explores the manipulation of inheritance and property laws by men.<sup>30</sup> The novel therefore reveals that when Heathcliff faces obstruction from his desired object (Catherine) due to social barriers, he is able to actively change his position by obtaining the physical, economic and social leverage he has access to. Catherine, on the other hand, is not afforded the same opportunities for self-creation.

In the late eighteenth century context in which Brontë sets her story, women had little autonomous financial or political agency and marriage was still seen as the sole means for establishing future security. Of course, published in 1847 and thus before important legislative reformations such as the Married Women’s Property Act of 1870, Brontë’s novel also reflects accurately on the situation of women at the time in which she was writing. Catherine is aware that her only access to a secure

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<sup>29</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> See Charles Percy Sanger, ‘The Structure of *Wuthering Heights*’, in *Wuthering Heights: An Authoritative Text with Essays in Criticism*, ed. by William. M. Sale Jr (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), pp.286-305. and Roy De Montpensier Stone, ‘Re “Wuthering Heights” and Re “Thrushcross Grange” Case for the Opinion of Counsel’, *Brontë Society Transactions*, 16:2 (2013), pp.118-130.

future as a woman is through marrying Edgar Linton, but her desire is, as Gilbert and Gubar first argued, to return to the “androgynous wholeness” and pre-gendered freedom of her youth.<sup>31</sup> Whereas Heathcliff demonstrates his power in society through his ability to move symbolically from outside to inside the window, Catherine’s desire to move from inside the house to outside on the moors, the space representing her adolescent years spent “half savage and hardy, and free” (91), is an impossible transition due to her social position. This is, as we will see, why Catherine becomes associated with the window as a space of longing that also reinforces her imprisonment. Writing on the Gothic trope of the boundary, Eugenia DeLamotte has argued that, “[T]he fact that the barrier does not mean the same thing for the man and the woman reflects the inequality between their respective control over those boundaries”.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, this is a common female Gothic trope as the house “is not just the domestic space, but itself a metaphor for the legal institutions of marriage and patrilineal inheritance”, and thus whereas Heathcliff’s occupation results in his power, male dynasty always signals a lack of female power in return.<sup>33</sup>

Catherine experiences a psychological and physical split due to her desire for the pre-gendered freedoms of her youth and her reluctant understanding of her need to secure a future for herself by marrying Edgar. As a representation of her lack of power, she dematerialises into a ghost. This is first described as a dualism. Nelly notes how Catherine’s inability to choose between a life metaphorically inside or outside the window, “led her to adopt a double character without exactly intending to deceive anyone” (83). Uncertain as to whether she should go through with her marriage, she describes her internal conflict as a disjunction between head and heart: “‘Here! and here!’ replied Catherine, striking one hand on her forehead, and the other on her breast [...] in my soul, and in my heart, I’m convinced I’m wrong!” (98). During Catherine’s experience of dualism, she is also increasingly associated with the window. For example, Nelly describes how “she increased her feverish bewilderment to madness, and tore the pillow with her teeth; then raising herself up all burning, desired that I would open the window” (88). The window provides visual access to the moors, that place which represents Catherine’s idealised, pre-gendered state of ‘androgynous wholeness’. She fantasises about returning to her childhood home as an expression of her desire to return to her childhood state, exclaiming, “[O]h, if I were but in my own bed in the old house! [...] that wind sounding in the firs by the lattice” (152). At one point she even transports herself there imaginatively as she fixes on “the grey square of the window” in her room at Thrushcross Grange whilst dreaming “that I

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<sup>31</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.284.

<sup>32</sup> Eugenia DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.26.

<sup>33</sup> Diana Wallace, ‘The Haunting Idea’: Female Gothic Metaphors and Feminist Theory’, in *The Female Gothic*, ed. by Diana Wallace & Andrew Smith (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.26-41 (p.29).

was enclosed in the oak-panelled bed at home; and my heart ached with some great grief which, just waking, I could not recollect" (152). Finally, in a following scene she threatens to break free from her imprisonment to get to "my narrow home out yonder: my resting place" by taking "a spring from the window" (156). Of course, Catherine never fully realises her fantasy of transcending the boundary of the domestic space, at least not in life. Rather, the window becomes a space she is repeatedly drawn to under the illusion of freedom, but one that subsequently torments her with its binary logic as a space that offers up visual access only to have the invisible boundary of the glass deny her physical omittance and reinforce her imprisonment in the domestic space.

As Catherine experiences her breakdown in proximity to the window, she also begins to be gradually associated with spectral qualities. As considered in the previous chapter, feminist critics have written extensively on the figure of the double in women's literature of the nineteenth century as a product of tensions arising from societal pressures to conform to oppressive gender roles. However, rather than depicting an external doubling as with *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Mason, who reflects an image of woman as a strong, powerful and revengeful being, Catherine's dematerialisation into a ghost reflects her lack of power and marginalised position in society. As Rosemary Jackson explains, "[D]isplaced from their society and history, dislocated from their bodies, minds and marriages, [women] move into another realm, in between things, to a kind of no-man's land".<sup>34</sup> The figure of this ghost aptly represents this state 'in between things' as it is in between life and death, freedom and imprisonment, visibility and invisibly, and is thus comparable to the nineteenth century woman who was supposedly valued for her role in the home but bound to it as an invisible prisoner.

Brontë first depicts Catherine as an increasingly spectral figure when she locks herself in her bedroom at the Grange in defiance of Edgar's demand that she chose between himself and Heathcliff. Spectrality is first suggested through her psychological weakening as Nelly describes her as speaking "dreamily" (150), "her mind had strayed" (149), "she was delirious" (154), "[H]er mind wanders" (156). Then, as her mental and physical condition worsens, these descriptions become more distinctly ghost-like. Nelly Dean describes,

Mrs. Linton sat in a loose white dress, with a light shawl over her shoulders, in the recess of the open window, as usual [...] there seemed unearthly beauty in the change. The flash of her eyes had been succeeded by a dreamy and melancholy softness; they no longer gave the

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<sup>34</sup> Rosemary Jackson, 'Introduction', in *What Did Miss Darrington See?: An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction*, ed. by Jessica Amanda Salmonson (New York: Feminist Press, 1989), p.xx.

impression of looking at the objects around her: they appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond—you would have said out of this world (192).

The image created here of Catherine's 'loose white dress', 'unearthly beauty', and 'dreamy and melancholy' eyes all contribute to the typical image of the woman-as-ghost as a crucially weak and vilified figure, disappearing into a non-existence reflective of her cultural and political ostracisation. By positioning her as a spectral presence even before death, Brontë aids in depicting Catherine as a victim of patriarchal oppression as she exclaims to Heathcliff, "[Y]ou have killed me – and thriven on it" (195). However, once Catherine becomes a physical ghost, her assumed weakness is nuanced with the suggestion of a newly gained power.

That there may be power in the female ghost's position is first suggested just before Catherine's demise. In her bedroom at Thrushcross Grange, there is a mirror near her window that has been covered with a "shawl" (151). This perhaps suggests Catherine's desire for external vision through the window and her rejection of the mirror's function in reflecting her position of domestic imprisonment. However, Nelly describes how on one evening "the shawl had dropped from the frame" (151) and, looking into the mirror, Catherine is unable to recognise her reflection as her own. However, her own body is also described as a "frame" in this scene as Nelly reveals how, "I took her hand in mine, and bid her be composed; for a succession of shudders convulsed her frame" (151). By drawing parallels between the mirror, the window, and the body as distinctively 'framed' objects, (they contain or offset a 'centre', be it one of vision or of essential 'self'), Brontë encourages us to view Catherine's 'convulsed frame' and deconstruction into ghostliness as a revolt against the structures represented by the frame. Indeed, if one of the central functions of the frame is to act as a barrier, to contain and define that which it holds, then Catherine's convulsing bodily frame can be interpreted as the beginnings of her dismantling of that specific boundary.

In an essay on 'confinement, control and gender in *Wuthering Heights*', Jamie Crouse notes that Catherine follows "means of gaining control that are consistent with the traditional female gender role, Catherine's confinements are essentially self-destructive".<sup>35</sup> Crouse reveals how Catherine uses her body to punish others as she is aware of her value as a woman to Heathcliff and Edgar and she is also aware that her body is the only thing of value over which she has control. Her transition into a ghost reflects the control she asserts over her own 'frame' by destroying its patriarchal value. Indeed, it has been noted that the figure of the ghost often signals women's rebellion against the value placed on their bodies as objects in patriarchal society. Marie Mulvey-Roberts argues that the desired female

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<sup>35</sup> Jamie Crouse, "This shattered prison": Confinement, Control and Gender in *Wuthering Heights*, *Brontë Studies*, 33 (2008), pp.179-191 (p.87).

body “is represented by the closed mouth, enclosed body and locked household door”, whereas the Gothic body rebels against that image.<sup>36</sup> In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha embodies the opposite of a feminine physicality as she is large, vampiric (open mouth), and by defying the locked doors of Thornfield to set fire to Rochester’s bed, she refuses to be fully ‘enclosed’. Mulvey-Roberts goes on to state that “fragmentation is conducive to hybridity”, and thus the ghost can be considered a revolt against the desired female body in that by de-materialising it actually promotes power in its new hybridity, its ability to be in multiple places at once and to defy boundaries.<sup>37</sup>

It is through death and her transition into a ghost that Catherine achieves a form of power she was not afforded in life. This should not be considered a total freedom, however, as the idea of woman’s death being her only access to power is clearly problematic. However, the figure of the ghost reflects both power and weakness as it symbolically embodies women’s marginalised position in society, but it is also afforded a power in its ability to defy the very boundaries of house and body that imprisoned her. The ghost should therefore be seen not as a powerfully free figure, but a powerfully disruptive one. Catherine’s ghost causes disruption and disorder in numerous ways in the novel, as we saw from her premature arrival in Lockwood’s dream at the beginning of the text. In the central tale, she disrupts in her position as what Esther Peeren called the ‘present absence’. Indeed, the ghost-Catherine torments Heathcliff by seemingly leading him towards her through her haunting, offering the suggestion of her presence or return, whilst at the same time standing as a reminder of the impossibility of that return and of Heathcliff’s inability to reunite with her.

Indeed, Peeren also notes that as an “object of intense fascination: any inkling of a haunting presence” by the ghost “is followed by an overwhelming desire to locate it, a frenzied insistence that it show itself again”.<sup>38</sup> By making themselves visible, ghosts invite the living to exorcise them of their secrets, implying that by doing so their haunting may be eradicated. This works on both a plot and narrative level in *Wuthering Heights*. For Heathcliff, who is the most ‘frenzied’ seeker of the ghost as we will shortly see, access to the ghost promises the reestablishment of his original union with Catherine and thus the elimination of her tormenting haunting as an illusory ‘present absence’. Following Miller’s reading of Catherine as the text’s centre of meaning, for the reader the discovery of the ghost promises to provide the key to understanding the tale by providing some sense of resolve. However, the paradox lies in the fact that although the ghost not only invites but demands its following, in *Wuthering Heights* this acts merely as a reminder of its status as a present absence.

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<sup>36</sup> Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ‘The Female Gothic Body’, in *Women and The Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp.106-119 (p.107).

<sup>37</sup> Mulvey-Roberts, ‘The Female Gothic Body’, p.111.

<sup>38</sup> Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, p.2.

Following the ghost-Catherine leads only to the realisation of Catherine's absence. There is a pattern here that the ghost promotes, one of being led towards suggested meaning only to find oneself met with the absence of meaning, that mirrors the frustrating effect of the recurring frame narrative.

Indeed, like Lockwood's narration, this movement is also associated with the window. I have suggested that for Catherine, the window originally represented her imprisonment, whilst for Heathcliff it represented a place of position reunion with Catherine. This is first visible in their initial separation at Thrushcross Grange, and then after Catherine's death the window becomes a space Heathcliff seeks to beckon Catherine's ghost. For instance, when Heathcliff returns from his mysterious quest for social and economic advancement, he is found by Nelly waiting in the garden at Thrushcross Grange hoping to catch a glimpse of Catherine through the window. However, the windows do not allow his visual access, they show "no light from within", instead they "reflected a score of glittering moons" (115) and thus reinforce to Heathcliff his position as an outsider. He seeks Catherine at the window on numerous other occasions, declaring to her, "I won't stray five yards from your window" (199). His state of waiting by the window, recalling their initial separation, associates it with a space of arrested time: "I have waited here an hour [...] and the whole of that time all round has been as still as death" (115). This state of what Lockwood referred to earlier as 'stagnant time' reflects the arrested time-sense created in the central tale to signal the repetition, and never the resolve, of the original trauma of separation.

Indeed, after Catherine's death Heathcliff continues to seek her at the window as the site of the original trauma of their disunion. However, rather than doing this to work through his trauma as Deborah Horvitz suggests in her more positive reading of trauma writing, it appears to reflect what Cathy Caruth saw as the compulsive repetition of trauma as an endlessly re-lived cycle.<sup>39</sup> The way Catherine's ghost haunts Heathcliff without fully revealing itself encourages this. For instance, in one scene Heathcliff describes to Nelly,

I looked round impatiently – I felt her by me – I could almost see her, and yet I could not! [...] When I sat in the house with Hareton, it seemed that on going out, I should meet her; when I walked on the moors I should meet her coming in. When I went from home, to return; she must be somewhere at the Heights, I was certain! And when I slept in her chamber—I was beaten out of that. I couldn't lie there; for the moment I closed my eyes, she was either outside the window, or sliding back the panels, or entering the room, or even resting her darling head

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<sup>39</sup> Deborah Horvitz, *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Ballimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

on the same pillow as she did when a child; and I must open my lids to see. And so I opened and closed them a hundred times a night—to be always disappointed! It racked me! (351).

What is significant here is that the language used suggests that Heathcliff does not simply seek Catherine, but that he is haunted by her in a way that encourages his seeking and encourages the repetition of trauma. Certainly, we feel Heathcliff's frustration in this scene where he states, 'I could almost see her, and yet I could not!', suggesting that she makes herself just visible enough to imagine but not visible enough to fully possess. The way she enters the house as he leaves, and leaves as he enters, furthers the sense that as ghost, Catherine is rebelling against making herself available for male possession like she was in life.

What we also see clearly in this scene is the familiar sense of being led towards potential meaning or revealing only to find oneself not at the centre, but at the periphery. This is literalised by the ghost-Catherine's physical position inside the house when Heathcliff is outside, and her entering the bedroom whilst he sleeps only to disappear when he awakes. Of course, if we were to read Catherine as a fragment of Heathcliff's imagination then this would simply imply the extent of his obsession and potential madness. However, Brontë clearly sets up the ghost in such a way that we are encouraged to read her as her own distinct, rebellious entity. Indeed, this is what Brontë implies by having the ghost Catherine appear to Lockwood at the beginning of the text and before her allotted time in the story-telling environment. The fact that she is seen by other characters reveals that she cannot be a reflection of Heathcliff's desires. Indeed, as we have seen, what the ghost Catherine stands for is the denial and refusal of Heathcliff's desires as she refuses to reveal herself to him and refuses to provide the reunion he craves. After all, reunion with Heathcliff is not what Catherine herself desired, despite critics commonly assuming that a mutual reunion drives both characters.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, what Catherine desires most is to return to the pre-gendered freedom represented by her youth before the barriers of gender and marriage were set in place to limit and control her.

Whilst Catherine was unable to achieve this in life, as a ghost she is able to defy certain physical and social barriers, and not only that, she also arguably exerts her power by putting an end to Heathcliff's destructive plan of revenge. Indeed, as Catherine's haunting becomes more intense, Heathcliff declares that, "[T]he entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!" (394). We see the full effect here of the ghost as a 'present absence' as even Heathcliff himself comes to realise that the presence of Catherine's ghost is merely a reminder of her

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<sup>40</sup> See John T. Matthews, 'Framing in *Wuthering Heights*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 27:1 (1985), pp.25-61., Steve Vine, 'Crypts of Identity: The Refusal of Mourning in *Wuthering Heights*', *English: Journal of the English Association*, 48:192 (1999), pp.169–186.

death and his inability to possess her. Around the same time, the reader receives a further sense that despite Heathcliff's perpetual searching, there is a stagnancy of movement occurring that symbolises the futility of his search. For instance, Nelly describes Heathcliff entering a room,

It was the same room into which he had been ushered, as a guest, eighteen years before: the same moon shone through the window; and the same autumn landscape lay outside [...] Heathcliff advanced to the hearth. Time had little altered his person either. There was the same man: his dark face rather sallow and more composed, his frame a stone or two heavier, perhaps, and no other difference (346).

There is a juxtaposition here between the natural environment which the reader expects to be little changed and the unnatural image of Heathcliff whose own unaltered state speaks of arrested development and a life lived in a state of purgatory and longing. These images of futile repetition that lead only to stagnancy proliferate towards the end of the novel to lead up to Heathcliff's death.

More importantly, though, before his death Heathcliff realises the futility of his actions and gives up his search for reunion with Catherine by both ceasing to seek her ghost and renouncing his tyrannical revenge plan. This is symbolised by Heathcliff's changed position to the window. Nelly describes finding him "leaning against the ledge of an open lattice, but not looking out: his face was turned to the interior gloom" (401). That Heathcliff is no longer 'looking out' suggests that he has given up his search for Catherine. Indeed, this is a notably sombre image that contrasts to the one we are presented with at the beginning of the novel when Lockwood discloses his dream to Heathcliff who rushes to the window to demand the ghost's entrance: "He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. 'Come in! come in!' he sobbed" (33). That the fire beside Heathcliff "had smouldered to ashes" (402) foreshadows his demise as just a few pages later Nelly finds him dead beneath the window. She describes,

The lattice, flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill; no blood trickled from the broken skin, and when I put my fingers to it, I could doubt no more: he was dead and stark! (407).

That there is to be any closure found in Heathcliff's death is, as the open window suggests, an unlikely resolution to the novel. Certainly, his eyes which were once referred to by Nelly as, "clouded windows of hell" (223), appear to defy respite as they remain as open as the flapping lattice, "I tried to close his eyes [...] They would not shut: they seemed to sneer at my attempts" (411). That his eyes 'seemed to sneer' at Nelly's attempts to shut them implies that, like Catherine's ghost, Heathcliff refuses to rest in death, and this is perhaps because neither of them get what it is they wanted in life.



Of course, it could be implied that through his death, Heathcliff is finally able to unite with Catherine. After all, although uncertain himself, Lockwood reveals that a “little boy” sees “Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t’ nab” (412) on the moors. However, if we are to believe that they have been united, then this state of limbo they exist in as ghosts is surely not meant to be a settling one for the reader. Simon Avery has acknowledged that although the marriage between the younger Catherine and Hareton at the close of the novel offers “the establishment of a nuclear family”, “the ending of *Wuthering Heights* is notoriously open”, as “unlike Charlotte, Emily refused to tidy away the gothic energies of her novel in its conclusion”.<sup>41</sup> However, Emily and Charlotte may be more similar in their endings than they at first appear. We saw in the previous chapter that Charlotte had difficulties concluding her novels. In *Jane Eyre* in particular, her conforming to certain expectations of gender roles makes the ending appear as a kind of compromise of the novel’s traditional and rebellious spirits. However, if the ending of *Wuthering Heights* could be compared to any Brontë novel, it is perhaps most like *Villette*. Emily can be seen to provide the Catherine-Hareton resolution to create, as Lucy Snowe’s union with M. Paul does, an outward image of resolution to the text which is then subtly undermined. Charlotte does this with the ambiguous suggestion of M. Paul’s death, and Emily does this with Heathcliff and Catherine’s resistance to theirs.

I outlined in the introduction that the ghost disturbs patriarchal orderings in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine’s ghost achieves this at plot level by disrupting Heathcliff’s tyrannical quest for possession and power and leading him to demise, and at narrative level by undermining the ordering attempts of the male frame narrator. The ending can therefore be seen to signal a final example of the undermining of the frame narrator as he stands for Brontë’s assumed male reader, a figure of the male public world that is in opposition to her domestic, female-centred text. The presence of the ghosts at the end of the novel might be brushed away by the naive Lockwood, who cannot “imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth” (414), but the reader sees the persistence of the ghosts for the more ominous message Brontë intended. Indeed, the persistence of the ghosts can be taken as the text’s ultimate commitment to disruption and disorder as it demonstrates the novel’s refusal to put an end to the repetitions of its traumas.

In this chapter thus far, I have wanted to consider the window as a symbolic and narrative tool in *Wuthering Heights*, one that is specifically linked to the novel’s more widely recognised and discussed ghost figure. I hope to have revealed the window to be as central a motif as the ghost itself, one that

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<sup>41</sup> Simon Avery, ‘Some strange and spectral dream’: The Brontës’ Manipulation of the Gothic Mode’, *Brontë Society Transactions*, 23:2 (1998), pp.120-135 (p.131).

is intimately associated with haunting and narrative. The second half of this chapter considers windows in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*. Here we will see how, as with Catherine, they are associated with a conventionally Gothic image of women's imprisonment, but one which Charlotte Brontë draws upon as a conscious literary trope which she then goes on to subvert.

## WINDOWS IN SHIRLEY: GENDER AND GENRE

In the opening to *Shirley*, the omniscient narrator asks the reader to set aside expectations of "sentiment, and poetry, and reverie" and prepare themselves for "[S]omething real, cool, and solid [...] something unromantic as Monday morning" (7).<sup>42</sup> Whether Brontë delivers on her promise of pragmatism is a question that has provoked much debate amongst critics. The most common charge made against the novel is exemplified by G. H. Lewes who in 1850 argued that *Shirley* "is not a picture; but a portfolio of random sketches"; his assertion that, "we are not sure that we can style it", highlighting a prevalent complaint that the novel lacks "unity" or consistency in topic and form.<sup>43</sup> It has become common to defend the novel's unity by revealing similarities between the treatment of working class men in the novel's 'condition of England' plot and middle-class women the 'woman question' issues it also explores. For example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and more recently Anna Krugovoy Silver, have demonstrated how Brontë uses hunger as a theme through which she unites the seemingly disparate struggles and desires of the two groups as they see "the dehumanizing effect of patriarchal capitalism" as a shared oppression amongst men and women.<sup>44</sup> Peter Capuano has also linked the novel's symbolism of redundant working-class male hands with the surplus hand-labour associated with women's sewing to align out-of-work labourers with "dispossessed middle-class women for whom professional opportunities outside the home were extremely limited".<sup>45</sup> Whilst these studies show unity across the novel's thematic concerns, less research has been done on the novel's playful and irregular use of genre and intertextual narrative references which contribute largely to its sense of disunity.

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<sup>42</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ed. by Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (Oxford & London: Oxford University Press; The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of the Brontës: 1979). All subsequent references to the text will be taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited parenthetically.

<sup>43</sup> 'Unsigned review', *Edinburgh Review*, xci (January 1850), 153–73; in Miriam Allott ed., *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 165.

<sup>44</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.387., Anna Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> Peter J. Capuano, 'Networked Manufacture in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Victorian Studies*, 55:2 (2013), pp.231-242 (p.232).

There have been some attempt to justify Brontë's use of numerous intertextual references or "subgenres".<sup>46</sup> For instances, Gisela Argyle argues that the novel is split into, "the comedy of manners, as typified by Jane Austen, the historical romance, as typified by Scott, and the psychological romance, as typified by Charlotte Brontë's own *Jane Eyre*".<sup>47</sup> More recently, Jennifer Judge has argued that the novel's overarching genre is that of a satire, and that this is employed to critique the intertextual references to patriarchal myths in the text and undermine their gender stereotypes.<sup>48</sup> I am more inclined to see the novel in line with Tara Moore, as one in which Brontë "depicts myths as products of a male-dominated society that demonstrate patriarchal expectations of womanhood".<sup>49</sup> However, whereas Moore suggests that women "look forward to a new mythology" and "create mythical narratives in which they are able to possess the authority of both narration and decision" in the text, I disagree.<sup>50</sup> I will reveal that Brontë makes reference to traditional narratives, much like she did in *Jane Eyre*, to demonstrate how women are limited by male attempts to reduce them to fictionalised roles that they wish to escape from. Rather than looking for a 'new mythology', central protagonist Caroline Helstone wishes to enter the 'reality' of the male world of work and usefulness but is repeatedly met with resistance from male expectations of the female role. Furthermore, whilst some have used themes from hunger to hands to unite the seemingly disparate gender issues the text explores, I look at the window as a space that is used to highlight the different situation of men and women and their varied opportunities to rebel against their lot.

In *Shirley*, women are frequently associated with windows as spaces that allow for the framing of moments of introspective reverie. However, this is something Brontë first explores in *Jane Eyre*. As we have seen, Jane is introduced in the novel sat in a window-seat as Brontë creates a space of physical intimacy and privacy that allows for her imaginative exploration. This now famous image can be considered a prime example of the "isolated figure at the window", usually female, that Isobel Armstrong has rightly described as "an endemic image of nineteenth-century iconography".<sup>51</sup> Indeed, from this moment onwards, the window is repeatedly drawn upon to frame introspective thought, often at moments that signal profound realisation or impending narrative change. Thus as a "two-way passage of vision", the window highlights how Jane's narrative of external, linear progress, one of moving forward through houses and institutions towards her final home at Ferndean, is one that also

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<sup>46</sup> Gisela Argyle, 'Gender and Generic Mixing in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 35:4 (1995), pp.741-756 (p.742).

<sup>47</sup> Argyle, 'Gender and Generic Mixing in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', p.743.

<sup>48</sup> Jennifer Judge, 'The "Bitter Herbs" of Revisionist Satire in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 7:1 (2011), pp.1-31.

<sup>49</sup> Tara Moore, 'Women and Myth Narratives in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Women's Writing*, 11:3 (2004), pp.477-492 (p.477).

<sup>50</sup> Moore, 'Women and Myth Narratives in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', p.489.

<sup>51</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.7.

relies upon introspective thought for personal revelation and growth.<sup>52</sup> For instance, at Gateshead Hall, Jane describes “breathing on the frost-flowers with which the window was fretted” (31), an act that Armstrong read as reflective of Jane’s desire for communication as, “[M]ost glass in the nineteenth century was blown by human breath. It was partly ‘petrified’ breath and partly frozen liquid” and is thus symbolic of her desire for human connection and intimacy.<sup>53</sup> Jane’s first experience of real intimacy occurs after this when she moves from Gateshead to Lowood School and befriends the kindly and pious Helen Burns. However, her friend soon dies, and Jane seeks the window, “putting [her] ear close to the window” (61), to signal her desire for contact.

At both Lowood school and Thornfield Hall, Jane can also be seen to seek the window as a place to imagine and even foreshadow her future freedom. At Lowood she describes, “I went to my window, opened it, and looked out [...] those most remote, the blue peaks; it was those I longed to surmount” (100), and shortly after takes up a position as governess at Edward Rochester’s abode. Then, at Thornfield she describes “look[ing] out afar over sequestered field and hill” from the attic window to declare how she, “longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit” (132). In each of these scenes the window provides a space where the heroine contemplates her desires for her future. For Jane, the window may present the boundary of the house or institution which she has been forced or driven to inhabit; but her ability for movement suggests that the boundary of the window does not reinforce the same oppression as it does for Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. In *Shirley*, Charlotte creates a similar image of Caroline Helstone as an imprisoned Gothic heroine sat longingly at the window, but this is a more self-consciously fictionalised and criticised image.

Caroline is first introduced to the novel by Robert Moore, her love-interest and eventual husband, who recalls “her shadow pass[ing] the window” (78) of his house. The window becomes a space that signals the barriers between them, and in particular it becomes a space of longing for Caroline. This is made evident in a following scene where, after a discussion with her uncle on the redundancy of marriage, she contemplates the unhappy union of her own parents at “the window-seat” (115). Here, Caroline is described “gazing from the window [...] watching the starling (though without seeing them)” (115). This ‘watching’ without ‘seeing’ highlights the importance of the window for providing a space of introspective thought and encourages the window’s association as an appropriate space for reverie. More so, this scene also sets Caroline up in the image of a traditional Gothic heroine like that of Catherine Earnshaw as we learn of her orphan status and how as a child she was “shut up, day and night, in a high garret-room” (115), although a situation little different to

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<sup>52</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.97.

<sup>53</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.4.

the one she currently finds herself in at her uncle's house. Indeed, variously in the novel Caroline is pictured "sat at her lattice, long gaz[ing] down on the old garden and older church, on the tombs laid out all gray and calm, and clear in moonlight" (290) and "in her chair near the window [...] wrapped in her white dressing-gown, leaning forward in the easy-chair, gazing steadily and patiently from the lattice" (478). These images lead the reader to consider Caroline as a Gothic heroine gazing longingly from the window.

However, Brontë subverts Gothic convention by challenging the traditional subject of Caroline's reverie. At first, we are led to believe that Caroline is gazing longingly for her love interest, Robert Moore. In the first aforementioned quote at the window, the narrator describes how Caroline imagined she "was with Moore, in spirit, the whole time; she was at his side; she heard his voice; she gave her hand into his hand" (290), and in the latter she is revealed to be waiting for him to pass by her bedroom window. The traditional Romantic Gothic image of the window-bound heroine waiting to be rescued by her love-interest is used to encourage the suggestion that Caroline's reverie is romantically inclined. However, we can see how Brontë subverts the reader's expectation of this motif when we take a closer look at what it is Caroline desires about Robert. For instance, as she engages in reverie, Caroline is often depicted considering Moore's occupation and day-to-day activities at the mill house where he works. Brontë reveals how she,

speculated on his feelings [...] mused over the mystery of "business," [...] endeavoured to realize the state of mind of a "man of business," to enter into it, feel what he would feel, aspire to what he would aspire (191).

Caroline does not simply picture Robert Moore at work, but she specifically 'muses over' the 'mystery' of his business, imagines what 'state of mind a man of business' would require, and then attempts to 'enter into it' to 'aspire to what he would aspire'. This suggests that what Caroline desires is not to necessarily be with Robert, but to be like him.

This is further suggested in a subsequent scene where Caroline imagines possessing "Prince Ali's tube (you remember it in the Arabian Nights?)" from which she might "take a view of Robert – to see where he was, how occupied" (256). Again, as with before, Caroline is not interested in looking at Robert romantically here, she is interested in looking at how he is 'occupied' in his work. The fact that she references 'Prince Ali's tube', a tool for magical, transportive vision, helps further the window's connotations as a space of imaginative vision that can help the protagonist visually picture herself in positions she cannot physically access. If the reader needed more explicit confirmation of the object of Caroline's desires, it is then revealed when the narrator divulges her "wish" that "nature had made

her a boy instead of a girl, that she might ask Robert to let her be his clerk, and sit with him in the counting house, instead of sitting with Hortense in the parlour” (89). Brontë thus sets Catherine up as a romance-desiring heroine at the beginning of the novel as a red herring, letting the reader believe that the novel has not managed to follow through with its promise of pragmatism and an absence of reverie as stated in the beginning. However, she then undermines the reader’s assumption that the proper object of a woman’s desire should be a man by revealing that what Caroline really desires is an occupation.

The desire for an occupation is an issue that crosses over the novel’s ‘woman question’ and ‘condition of England’ concerns. Indeed, *Shirley* is a novel in which working class men and middle-class women are both in want of work. However, Brontë shows how traditional gender ideologies prevent middle-class women from accessing the public world of work and commerce, despite their elevated social status. Like in *Wuthering Heights*, Caroline shows her frustrations with her situation at multiple points in which she turns to the window for imaginative respite, but at the same time the window reminds her of the limits of her position. For instance, during a visit from the Sykes family in which Caroline is expected to perform dutiful social and domestic tasks, she escapes from the “unmeaning hum around her” (134) into another room to be alone with her thoughts. Brontë once again distinguishes between ‘looking’ and ‘seeing’ here as it is described how, “her senses, her hearing, her vision” were “weary with listening to nothing, and gazing on vacancy” (134). Whilst domestic and social drudgery amounts to ‘nothing’ in Caroline’s eyes, that which is worth seeing appears to be reached introspectively:

As to her mind, that flew directly to the Hollow. It stood on the threshold of the parlour there, then it passed to the counting-house, and wondered which spot was blessed by the presence of Robert (134-135).

In *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Sally Shuttleworth states that, “Trapped in a stagnant economy, where the market is glutted and circulation has ceased, Caroline is powerless to change her situation. Her energies, which should be directed outward, are obstructed, turned inwards against herself [...]”.<sup>54</sup> The ‘nothing’ and ‘vacancy’ of the domestic space reflects the stagnant domestic economy Shuttleworth refers to, and this is reinforced by the window which physically expresses the idea that Catherine’s energies, ‘which should be directed outward’, are ‘obstructed’ by her physical imprisonment behind the window in the domestic sphere.

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<sup>54</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1998), p.186.

Caroline's exclusion from work is not always expressed by the boundaries of the domestic space, however, as it is also represented by her physical exclusion from Moore's counting house. There are a few scenes in the novel where we see Caroline take up "a certain stile under a certain old thorn" where she "could look down on [Robert's] cottage" and into "the well-known counting-house window" (209). Her ability to look into Robert's cottage from an outside position is important in two ways. First, these moments provide Caroline with a rare opportunity to see without being seen: "[S]he stopped, withdrawing a little behind a willow, and studied his appearance" (117). Elizabeth Langland has highlighted how the Victorian woman, as the moral centre of the home and public face of the family unity, was herself usually the one under the watchful gaze of society:

Although ladies at home did not live in glass cells, there was the constant possibility that they would be visited at any moment. They had, in effect, to be always ready for the regulatory gaze of society. Morning calls and afternoon teas serves as a continual check over their behaviour.<sup>55</sup>

Langland compares this scrutinous social gaze to Bentham's Panopticon, "a prison designed so that the inmates would be constantly under an unseen but all-seeing surveillance".<sup>56</sup> The regulating effects of social surveillance is a topic Brontë explores throughout *Shirley* from the dropping in of unexpected visitors from which Caroline wishes to escape to the various yet seemingly unnecessary tasks performed by middle-class women and female servants to accommodate guests. However, in the scenes where Caroline watches Robert through the counting-house window, she is able to observe and, it is implied, desire freely without the judging gaze of society that would condemn her for her transgressive desire.

The description of Caroline watching Moore through his counting-house window is uncannily similar to Foucault's description of panoptical surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes,

By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and perfectly visible [...] Visibility is a trap.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Langland, *Telling Tales: Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), p.20.

<sup>56</sup> Langland, *Telling Tales*, p.20.

<sup>57</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.170.

Certainly, Caroline also observes Moore from a type of 'tower', a vantage point in the hills above his counting-house that allows her to "look down on the cottage" (209) and see without being seen. The 'effect of backlighting' is achieved by the "well-known lamp" which creates a "shadow" of Moore as like a puppet in a 'small theatre'; the notion of him moving "between the light and the lattice" (209) suggesting that he too is trapped in visibility. Although Robert does not know he is being watched and thus does not experience the modification of behaviour that comes with this type of panoptic surveillance, the subversive quality of this scene lies not in Moore's position but in the freedom that solitary viewing provides for Caroline as an escape from the social surveillance she is subjected to as a woman in the home. Furthermore, her position disrupts the typical female-object, male-subject scopical relationship. Although Caroline is unable to join Moore in his counting house and work with him as his equal, these scenes which invert the gendered power dynamics of looking go partially satisfy Caroline's fantasy of experiencing a masculine position.

The challenging of a dominant male vision is also explored elsewhere in the text, particularly in relation to the novel's commentary on genre and narrative. We considered in the introduction how critics like Sally Greene have seen a tension "between 'fiction' and 'reality'" in the novel.<sup>58</sup> Brontë can be seen to create this tension by frequently exploring the redundancy of 'fictional' narratives as they are associated with women's traditional roles and with denying them from the 'reality' of their pragmatic desires for a more useful position in society through work. For instance, on the topic of a young woman's entrance into adulthood, the narrator suggests that, "at eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to be commenced [...] Elf-land lies behind us, the shores of Reality rise in front" (109). The narrator goes on to make 'experience' the focus of the necessary transition from fantasy to reality by declaring, "in short, at eighteen, the school of Experience is to be entered" (110). Addressing 'experience' directly, the narrator continues, "[I]t is by your instructions alone that man or woman can ever find a safe track through life's wilds: without it, how they stumble, how they stray" (110). As if to satirise this point, the narrator's case for women's 'experience' in the real world is then followed by a conversation between Caroline and her uncle in which he encourages her to "stick to the needle – learn shirt-making and gown-making, and pie-crust-making" (111), activities that would hardly provide the experience necessary to guide Caroline, or any woman, through 'life's wilds'.

What Brontë is suggesting here is that if women are to enter 'reality' and leave 'Elf-land' behind, they need experience in the 'real world' and to not be confined to fictional narratives, like the Gothic narrative of oppression Caroline finds herself living with her uncle. However, Brontë also shows

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<sup>58</sup> Sally Greene, 'Apocalypse When? *Shirley's* Vision and the Politics of Reading', *Studies in the Novel*, 26:4 (1994), pp.350-371 (p.358).



how women do their best to reject these narrative situations. Caroline demonstrates that her dissatisfaction in life is derived from her limited position and lack of opportunities as a woman. As she relays to Shirley, “men and women are so different; they are in such a different position. Women have so few things to think about, men so many” (256). When Shirley responds by asking, “don’t you wish you had a profession – a trade?”, Caroline answers, “I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands and to occupy my thoughts” (257). However, Brontë continues to draw the reader’s attention towards genre and narrative to reinforce the ways in which women are denied access to a ‘position’ and are confined within traditional narrative roles. There are three main sequences in the text where she explores this. First, through Shirley and Caroline’s various re-interpretations of religious, mythological and literary representations of women; second, through the interjection of a parody of the fairy-tale genre in a sequence told from the point of view of Martin Yorke; and third, in a direct discussion of a Gothic romance novel, Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797), which occurs between Caroline and Rose Yorke.

At multiple points in the novel, Shirley Keeldar is depicted challenging typical assumptions of the female gender. That she may differ from Caroline in this way is suggested from her very entrance into the text. For one, Shirley demonstrates a relationship to the window that differs from Caroline’s. As we saw previously, Caroline enters the narrative as a ‘shadow’ passing by Moore’s window. However, as Gilbert and Gubar have recognised, Shirley “enters the novel that bears her name through the glass doors of the garden” and is “[A]lmost always pictured (when indoors) beside a window”.<sup>59</sup> Despite highlighting Shirley’s associations with this space, Gilbert and Gubar do not explore its meaning. However, the fact that Shirley enters in full clarity of vision through the glass doors is suggestive of her boldness of character in comparison to the timid Caroline Helstone who enters as a ‘shadow’. Furthermore, her proximity to the glass also offers a contrasting image to that of the forlorn Gothic heroine. For instance, in one scene where the two women shelter indoors whilst a storm rages outside, Caroline is described “withdrawn to the farthest and darkest end of the room [...] pacing to and fro, muttering to herself fragments of well-remembered poetry” (252). This image is appropriately introspective for Caroline’s more subdued character, whereas the self-proclaimed “Captain Keeldar” (227) is described, “sat at the window, watching the rack in heaven, the mist on earth, listening to certain notes of the gale that plained like restless spirits” (252), in an image evocative of a captain at the bow of a ship, fearless and willing to face the elements.

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<sup>59</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.381.

In keeping with this depiction of fearlessness, Shirley is often seen challenging traditional narrative perceptions of women. For instance, in one conversation with Catherine she reimagines Milton's Eve not as a domestic figure but as a "woman-Titan", a universal mother who was "heaven-born. Vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations, and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation" (360). Shirley's "Titan visions" (362) appear to have influence on Caroline as in a following scene Caroline offers a challenge to a male interpretation of the bible. Here the women confront a worker at Robert Moore's mill, Joe Scott, who refuses to discuss business with them on the grounds that, "I cannot argue, where I cannot be comprehended" (370). Caroline accuses Joe of short-sightedness during a debate over a translation of St. Paul's first Epistle to Timothy in the Bible. Scott holds a traditional belief that women, responsible for the original sin, should "take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion" (338), to which Caroline responds: "I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether" (371). Later in the novel, Shirley addresses the unjustness of this interpretive fallibility to Caroline where she states,

If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light [...] their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. Then to hear them fall into ecstasies with each other's creations [...] false as the rose in my best bonnet there (395).

That women are falsely 'read' by men and objectified through 'each other's creations' as passive or idealised figures utilises literary language to further the implication that women are confined to a sort of narrative fictionalisation, trapped in an angel/monster dichotomy that prevents them from being seen for their value and worth to society.<sup>60</sup>

Brontë goes on to further explore this idea through satire in one of the most explicitly intertextual sequences in the novel: the Martin Yorke subplot. Although this particular narrative interjection has been one of the main sources for accusations of fragmentation and disunion in the novel, appearing as it does to randomly disrupt the narrative realism Brontë promises at the beginning, by parodying the fairy tale genre in this sequence we can see how the reader's attention is drawn to the limitations of gender conventions within traditional, patriarchal representations of male and female roles. This section begins when Robert Moore falls ill and is forced to recover at the Yorke

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<sup>60</sup>Gilbert and Gubar refer to the angel/monster dichotomy as "those mythic masks male artists have fastened over [woman's] face both to lessen their dread of her "inconstancy" and [...] to possess her more thoroughly". Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.17.

household. Searching for a way to unite with him, Caroline stumbles across the young Martin Yorke reading in the woods and he agrees to help her, delighting in the opportunity for adventure in the real world rather than in the “contraband volume of Fairy tales” (646) before him. Susan Gubar considered Martin Yorke as a “parody of the [male] author”, who in viewing women as “weakly, selfish, shallow [...] A thread-paper, a doll, a toy” (671), takes sadistic enjoyment in manipulating Caroline’s fate.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, there is a notable ease to which Martin Yorke moves from being the reader or consumer of fictional narratives to creating real action and adventure for himself that criticises how women are made puppets in male fictional creation. Whilst comical, Martin’s tale is in keeping with the suggestion made throughout *Shirley* that women are encased within patriarchal structures from which they struggle to escape. However, due to the fact that gender roles are confused in this sequence, (Moore is the forlorn damsel and Caroline is his saviour, and a female nurse is referred to as the “dragon” (651) who keeps him “captive” (641)), it is clear that Brontë intended to satirise the conventional male-hero, female-victim gender roles to expose them for their limitations.

Furthermore, in a scene where Caroline discusses a Gothic novel, Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, with Rose Yorke, we can see Brontë’s most overt consideration and criticism of romance narratives and Caroline’s rejection of a role within one. As Caroline and Rose discuss the novel, the former reveals that although she was “wonderfully taken” with it as a child, to live the “wanderer’s life” of a Gothic heroine would only lead, she fears, to “disappointment, vanity, and vexation of spirit” (452). Rose on the other hand is drawn to a traveller’s life and rejects the idea of living what she considers to be Caroline’s fate, “a long, slow death” (451) at Brairfield Rectory. To Rose, Radcliffe’s novel represents the thrill of travel and romance, whereas the domestic situation that Caroline seems content with is what she is more inclined to see as an oppressive Gothic fate. However, as we learn from the future-seeing narrator, Rose does eventually fulfil her wish of travel, and despite Anna Lepine’s suggestion that through this, “Brontë hints at a future in which those aspiring to the single life may discover a different kind of ‘happy ending’”, Rose’s fate does not appear to be depicted as a success.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, through the omniscient narrator we see Rose at her sister’s funeral and then as “a lonely emigrant” (167) abroad. Thus although Mrs. Yorke considers Caroline as, “better suited to a novel-heroine than to a woman who is to make her way in the real world” (454), her own daughter is the one who succumbs to a tragic, novelistic fate. However, as the reader by now understands, Caroline does not have a romantic outlook and her “earnest wish was to see things as they were, and not to be romantic”

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<sup>61</sup> Susan Gubar, ‘The Genesis of Hunger, According to *Shirley*’, *Feminist Studies*, 3:3 (1976), pp.5-21 (p.20).

<sup>62</sup> Anna Lepine, “‘Virgin Solitude’: Envisioning a Textual Space for Spinsters in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*”, *Victorian Review*, 33:1 (2007), pp.121-136 (p.127).

(191). Indeed, by the end of the novel Caroline achieves a position for herself in a situation as “real, cool, and solid” (7) as the narrator first proposed as she attains a position as a teacher at a school.

In the introduction to this thesis, I proposed that windows were used in two different ways in this novel. The first was in association with reverie where it took on Gothic connotations as a space for articulating Caroline’s longing for a position whilst reinforcing her limited opportunities as a woman bound to the domestic space. The second was in association with working-class male rebellion, and it is to this second use of the window that this discussion will now turn. One of the ways Brontë demonstrates not only a connection but a difference between the struggles of working-class men and middle-class women’s desire for work is through the window. The novel’s ‘condition of England’ plot considers the Luddite Rebellions of 1811-1812 that occurred as a result of loss of work amongst textile workers due to industrial advancements, particularly the development of new technologies. A recognised part of the rebellion was the smashing of the machine frames that workers felt were usurping their place and a general wrecking of textile factories, including the smashing of windows. In *Shirley*, windows are a space where the male factory workers express their frustrations over their positions and subsequently rebel against them.

For example, after Robert Moore’s machines are ruined on the way to the mill at the beginning of the novel, Mr. Helstone asks, “I do not see a mask or a smutted face present; and there is not a pane of glass broken in your windows. Have you had an attack, or do you expect one?” (41). Although it was the machine-frames that had been destroyed, that broken windows were first associated with the rioter’s rebellion reveals just how central windows were to political protest during this time. This is something Isobel Armstrong explores in *Victorian Glassworlds* where she explains how in the nineteenth century,

Glass was a crucial site of political conflict nationally, a visible target for violent demonstrations of fury and protest. Window-breaking was endemic to what a historian has called the ‘spectacular’ riot of the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup>

Armstrong notes how it was common practice amongst female suffragettes in the latter part of the century also. The motives for window-smashing were varied. Practically, the window is the weakest point in the building and thus the easiest to rupture. Breaking windows are thus a way of making a visible impact by causing financial damage without stealing or trespassing. However, the act was also steeped in symbolic significance.

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<sup>63</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University press, 2008), p.57.

First, as a viscerally audible act, window-smashing provided a way for workers to be heard at a time when voting rights had still not been achieved for working-class men. As Armstrong continues, unlike more covert acts such as stealing or striking, “[T]he jouissance of window-breaking is associated with violent, traumatic sound and the insistence on being heard”.<sup>64</sup> In *Shirley*, a worker declares to Robert Moore that, “I'd neither kill a man nor hurt a man; and I'm not for pulling down mills and breaking machines [...] but I'll talk—I'll mak as big a din as ever I can” (154). Although a positive example is made from this worker for choosing to abstain from physical violence, Brontë here highlights the working-class man's insistence on being heard in the debate on industrial progress which ignored the struggles of the individual worker, an issue that is highlighted in *Shirley* through their repeated reduction to “the hands” (29) and the “frame-breakers” (30). The visceral sound of rupturing glass was thus part of the process of making ‘as big a din’ as possible, symbolically shattering workers’ enforced political silence and demonstrating their united power. Brontë conflates window-smashing with another popular form of protesting that occurs in the novel in the ruining of machine-frames. In one scene, a rioter tells Moore his frames have been “shivered to smash” (40) on the road before reaching his mill. The choice of ‘shivered’ and ‘smash’ here share an auditive association with the sound of breaking glass and thus links the destruction of machines to window-smashing and the ‘insistence on being heard’. This is echoed later in the novel during the climactic riot at Robert's mill where Brontë writes,

A crash—smash—shiver—stopped their whispers. A simultaneously hurled volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice lay in shattered and pounded fragments (386).

As the sound of shattered glass ends the whispers, Brontë then writes, “[A] yell followed this demonstration—a rioters' yell” (386), and the sound of window-smashing becomes synonymous with the victory of broken silence.

In relation to political protest, the violations to windows surveyed in Armstrong's study occur predominantly to public buildings. However, in *Shirley* there are clear anxieties surrounding the spreading of factory-made violence to the home as well. Indeed, the separation of public and private spheres that grew out of the industrial revolution put further emphasis on the home as space of moral and spiritual sanctity, as considered in the introduction. The notion of angry factory workers invading the domestic sanctum to make a direct attack upon their oppressors is used to highlight the severity of their situation. Like the factory, the windows of the house are the weakest structural point and thus

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<sup>64</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.67.

the obvious place for intrusion. However, the transparency of the window also invites the gaze, an alternative kind of intrusion that could prove lethal without having to enter the house itself. On three occasions in the novel Brontë references men being shot at through domestic windows. In one scene, Moore recalls a man named Pearson, “who was shot at not, indeed, from behind a hedge, but in his own house, through his staircase window, as he was going to bed” (70). By relocating the threat of violence from the working environment to the domestic sphere, the workers literally drive ‘home’ the message that if industrial progress is to directly affect their own domestic and familial situations, so too should it become a domestic issue for the factory owners.

As we have seen, in many of the scenes that focus on the rebellions of the Luddites there is an emphasis on a call to action and an insistence on being heard. If we compare this to the way windows are used to signal female imprisonment, there is a notable contrast to be found between men and women’s ability to rebel against their situations. This is directly explored in the novel’s climactic scene where the rioters attack Robert’s mill and Mr. Helstone asks Shirley and Caroline to protect the house by watching for potential intruders. As we saw in the introduction, by the mid-nineteenth century when Charlotte was writing her novel, that women were expected to be the moral and governmental overseers of the household was well established. Domestic conduct manuals such as the popular, *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management* (1861), utilised a masculine, military language to put women’s domestic duties on par with the plight of men in the public world, stating that, “[A]s with the commander of an army, or the leader of any enterprise, so it is with the mistress of a house”.<sup>65</sup> Brontë literalises this role when Shirley and Caroline are asked to protect the Helstone’s house. Armed with pistol and knife, the two women, led by “Captain Keeldar” (277), conduct themselves with a severity that parallels the war-like situation at Robert’s mill. As if mirroring their new-found positions of power, the window then ceases to function as a barrier reinforcing their domestic imprisonment.

For instance, as the women watch for intruders they are described as confidently straddling the threshold of the window: “[T]hey both sat near the window, and both leaned their arms on the sill, and both inclined their heads towards the open lattice” (377). Hearing something in the bushes outside, Shirley then passes through, and although “Caroline would not have quitted the house had she been alone” (378), with ‘Captain Keeldar’ leading, she follows. The women then discover a band of rioters and overhear of their plan to attack Robert’s mill. They decide to make their way over to raise the alarm and from this point onwards, no barriers stand in their way: “[T]hey started; they ran. Many a wall checked but did not baffle them”, “a strong and foaming channel would have been a

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<sup>65</sup> Isabella Beeton, *Mrs Beeton’s Household Management* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), p.1.

barrier to neither" (382). Another symbolic function Armstrong aligns with window-smashing is that, "[T]o smash the barrier of glass, getting rid of its obstruction by force, is one way of demonstrating that dependency can reverse into freedom".<sup>66</sup> Although they do not smash the glass, that the two women do eventually and for the first time pass through the window's barrier seems to suggest, alongside subsequent references to crossed boundaries in this scene, a comparable act of liberation.

However, Brontë troubles this seemingly straightforward symbolism. For instance, the reader is at first led to believe that Shirley and Caroline have gained a new-found power and agency and will leave the house to save the men at Robert's mill by warning them of the impending attack. However, when they arrive, they soon realise they are too late, the rioters have been and left, and they find themselves rendered inoperative once again. In a conversation that occurs between the two women shortly after their arrival and after their realisation that they can be of no help, Brontë reminds the reader of the novel's original promise of a refusing to satisfy desire for "passion, and stimulus, and melo-drama" (7). At first, Caroline insists on running to Robert's aid, but Shirley reminds her that, "[T]hese are not the days of chivalry" (384) and her "romantic rush on the stage" (385) would only "make a spectacle" and "tease and annoy" (390) Moore. Through Shirley's language, Brontë once again undermines romantic narratives and fictionalisation by revealing the absurdity of Caroline's suggested intervention, comparing it to a theatrical performance, a 'rush on the stage'. Rather than attempt to help, the two women return to the house to resume domestic duties and reoccupy their original places behind the window. Like the women, the rioters too return to their regular positions as "the glittering fragments of the shattered windows" (389) are swept away, and Robert rebuilds his mill.

This scene is significant not only for revealing the crossover between the plights of working-class men and middle-class women, but for helping justify the novel's ending. Certainly, this scene does not conclude in an empowering situation for the women or for the Luddites. Shirley and Caroline are not able to take on the empowered positions their narrative re-telling's imagined women in, and nor do the rioters win Robert Moore's sympathy and regain employment. Indeed, industrial advancement is not halted, in fact, we learn in the final pages that, "the manufacture's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes" flourish and come to replace the "once green, and lone, and wild" (739) landscape. At the end of the climactic riot scene, things go back to the way they were. This is, however, in keeping with Brontë's rejection of melodramatic narratives. What this reveals is that Brontë was committed to her promise of pragmatism at the beginning of the novel, and

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<sup>66</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p.91.

thus the novel's end becomes the space where she attempts to resolve the issues of a lack of position, for both women and men, whilst remaining crucially realistic.

As in *Jane Eyre*, an element of happenchance is required. When Robert Moore returns from a trip to London where he sees the extent of working-class poverty, of those with "no occupation and no hope", he comes to the realisation that, "[T]o respect himself, a man must believe he renders justice to his fellow-men" (616). Women benefit from Moore's change of heart too. For Caroline, change is initiated when Moore falls ill and is restored to health by three women, Mrs. Horsfall, Mrs. Yorke, and Caroline herself. As Elizabeth Langland states, "Robert must experience a dependence inflicted on him by women to discover the real reliance and dependence he has on others", and from this he learns the value of female labour.<sup>67</sup> Brontë then provides a surprising conclusion where the text's two united issues are seemingly overcome as "salaries for a master and mistress" (738) are created alongside working-class employment. Caroline unites with Moore in marriage, but this appears to be necessary for her access to occupation as he offers her both a day-school and Sunday-school. Even Shirley becomes willingly submissive to a "master" (730) husband, Moore's brother, Louis Moore, whose lower status and ability check her temperament promises to bring balance and harmony to her position which has thus far rendered her a misfit in society.

However, despite the supposed harmony, the language used by the omniscient narrator at the ending of the novel is notably satirical. First, the narrator refuses to outline a clear moral ending, "I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral [...] I only say, God speed him in the quest!" (741). This mocking tone suggests that Brontë made a moral outcome to her tale purposefully difficult to discern. It is certainly perplexing to consider why Brontë would show the failure of the rioters and of the women in the novel's climactic scene, only to have their aims achieved by charity at the end of the novel. On the one hand, this could be seen as Brontë's suggestion that reform can only come from the top, and that figures of patriarchal capitalism such as Robert Moore can only be changed if change comes of their own accord. However, it may also be, as we saw in the ending of *Jane Eyre*, a compromise on the part of the author, a compromise between a desire to end her novel how she wanted, (perhaps more pessimistically or subversively), and a desire to fulfil the reader's more hopeful expectations. The narrator seems to suggest this by exclaiming, "[T]here! I think the varnish has been put on very nicely" (723), mocking the reader by suggesting that the ending may not in fact provide an escape from fictional narratives or stay true to reality at all.

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<sup>67</sup> Langland, *Telling Tales: Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature and Culture*, p.14.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION IN *THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL*: ART, GOSSIP, TEXT



Figure 3:1 Emily Mary Osborn, *Nameless and Friendless* (1857)

At the Royal Academy in 1857 one of the Victorian era's most successful female artists, Emily Mary Osborn, exhibited *Nameless and Friendless*, a painting which depicts a young female artist attempting to sell her work to an art dealer. Through her image Osborn deals with issues of female representation nearly identical to those raised by Anne Brontë in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1847). In particular, and as Deborah Cherry states, "*Nameless and Friendless* registers the difficulties of representing the woman artist in a newly defined visual field which codified woman as image rather than as maker of images".<sup>1</sup> This is explored through the conflicting gazes Osborn implements to signal the woman artist's struggle to assert her autonomy and status as an artist in a patriarchal society that condemned women to the role of the art object. The subject's timid, downward glance contrasts with the agentic gazes of the male figures that surround her. The art dealer looks judgementally at the painting as he decides whether he will gratify her with a purchase or turn her out onto the street, highlighting women's reliance upon male authority in a patriarchal art world that possesses the power to accept or reject their status as artist. In the background, a gentleman peeks through the screened window from outside, addressing the fear of the working woman's new visibility in the public world of commerce. To the subject's left two men hold a painting of a ballerina, but rather than studying the image they gaze freely upon the young artist as if sizing her for her worth instead. As a comparable portrait of a working woman, the ballerina becomes proxy for the female subject and bears the implication that the woman herself might be 'for sale' should she be pushed to desperation by an inability to earn a living. The risk of prostitution is further implied by the dancer's bare skin which contrasts with the sombre black garbs of the artist, a sign of her orphan or widow status which acts to signal her vulnerability and desperation.

Although Osborn's painting clearly seeks to highlight cultural anxieties of the woman artist as traversing definitions of respectable femininity and even signalling sexual deviancy, she still manages to create a sympathetic depiction of her subject's position. She does this by highlighting the multiplicity of the objectifying male gaze. As Cherry states, this "visibly demonstrates that a woman does not lose her respectability by working, but rather that it is endangered by men in the workplace".<sup>2</sup> However, she also creates sympathy by carefully managing the representation of the female subject herself. The subject does not possess an agentic gaze, rather her downward glance is suggestive of a traditionally feminine meekness, or a suitable shame and embarrassment towards her position. As Cherry again recognises, Osborn's subject represents the 'needy lady' or 'distressed gentlewoman' figure popular at the time:

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p.78.

<sup>2</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.81.

From the later 1830s the distressed gentlewoman managed the contradictions between a strengthening of domestic ideology and coincident economic pressures for middle-class women to earn money: the 'needy lady' worked not because of choice but because of financial necessity [...] This category was put to work by women artists because its strong connotations of gentility worked against the claims that the 'lady' who worked lost caste, sacrificed her class position and endangered her purity.<sup>3</sup>

By depicting the female subject as working out of necessity, Osborn "evoked sympathy" in an audience who may have otherwise questioned her subject's unusual or even 'improper' desire for a role outside her designated sphere of the home.<sup>4</sup>

The central conflict of Osborn's image appears to be the dual position the female artist is forced to occupy: she is a "desiring subject" entering the marketplace made "desired object" by the shifting gaze of the male spectators who transform her from "cultural producer" into "visual image".<sup>5</sup> However, there seems to be another dual tension at play here. Osborn makes clear that her subject is objectified and limited in her ability to contribute to the commercial market by patriarchal structures, and yet despite this criticism her subject still conforms to a traditional, sympathetic female representation as a 'needy lady'. Osborn's woman painter is not a desiring and assertive subject, she is a desperate one. Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was published a decade before Osborn's painting was exhibited, and yet the two are remarkably similar in how they deal with the issue of representing a societally non-conforming female figure in a surprisingly conforming way. The protagonist of Brontë's novel, Helen Graham, presents a double threat to society as she is not only a working female artist but also a single mother. The non-linear narrative Brontë sets up helps draw attention to the ways in which the reader may make assumptions about the morality of the protagonist. Indeed, at first we know little about Helen other than what is implied through gossip, yet as the narrative unfolds and we travel retrospectively through her diary, we see how she is driven through desperation to leave her neglectful, alcohol-dependent husband and take up the production and selling of art to support herself and her child whilst in hiding.

Like Osborn's subject, Helen is a needy lady who works out of necessity and not desire. However, this has not been recognised by critics. As stated in the introduction, there is a desire to see Helen as a professional woman artist and thus as a bold and subversive figure for her time. However, I will reconsider Helen's relationship to art and other modes of representation in this chapter to reveal

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<sup>3</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.79-80.

<sup>4</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.80.

<sup>5</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.81.

that art is equally integral to the novel as gossip and writing. These alternate modes of representation are used to explore the central concern of the novel: how to represent an unconventional female figure who is wrongly condemned by society due to her social and occupational position. Indeed, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as Cherry states of *Nameless and Friendless*, “is not only a representation of woman but an address to the nature of representation itself”.<sup>6</sup> My issue with the novel is that in drawing attention to the ways Helen struggles with self-representation in a hostile, patriarchal society, Brontë often appears to over-compensate by depicting her as impeccably pure and moral in a way that contrasts with the more realistic, multidimensional female characters we are presented with in Emily and Charlotte’s novels. Moreover, her tendency to deal with misrepresentation by having Helen adopt a high level of moral propriety and feminine behaviour means that at times she appears silenced and marginalised in the text to an extent that is detrimental to the cause. However, it is also important to look at the context in which Brontë was writing and consider how her novel deals with issues of representation in a way that consolidates a female power that would have been considered legitimate at the time. Although her text is far more restrained than her sisters’, we can ultimately see how *Tenant* is similar to *Wuthering Heights* and *Villette* in the way it de-centralises the female protagonist and offers an alternative way of constructing and displaying female subjectivity and female power.

## ART

The first scene that features the female artist in the act of production in *Tenant* occurs in the sixth chapter when Gilbert Markham stumbles across Helen Huntington sketching by a brook. At this point, Helen’s identity and history is still a mystery to the reader and to the narrator, who tells his story retrospectively in an epistolary fashion. What we do know from an earlier scene is that Helen is a working artist who sends her paintings to London to be sold. As we have seen, the multiple gazes of the male spectators in Osborn’s painting help establish a sympathetic viewpoint of the subject by demonstrating how the female artist struggles to assert her status in a social and cultural environment that persistently views her as an art object. Brontë implements the determining male gaze to comparable effect. For instance, as Helen sketches, Gilbert describes her, “studying the distinctive characters of the different varieties of trees in their winter nakedness”, as he, “stood and watched the progress of her pencil: it was a pleasure to behold it so dexterously guided by those fair and graceful fingers” (50).<sup>7</sup> The description of the ‘naked’ trees alongside Gilbert’s expression of ‘pleasure’ in watching Helen paint depicts a clear sexualisation of the woman artist in the act of production. Indeed,

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<sup>6</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.80.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. by Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford & London: Oxford University Press; The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of the Brontës: 1992). All subsequent references to the text will be taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited parenthetically.

Gilbert does not show interest in the product of Helen's artistic attempts, and despite acknowledging that, "her sketch did not profit by my superintendence" (50), makes her the object of his unwanted gaze.

Although she misreads Helen as a professional artist in her analysis of *Tenant*, Antonia Losano's study of *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* usefully reveals how "the woman painter in the act of painting was for the Victorians an object of aesthetic pleasure and scrutiny", and scenes like this in which a woman artist paints whilst being observed by a man were common.<sup>8</sup> Such scenes enable Brontë to critique how a man "attempts – with varying success – to contain the painting woman inside a frame, to turn her back into a beautiful art object".<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in a following scene when Helen paints by a beach, Gilbert describes,

I could not help stealing a glance, now and then, from the splendid view at our feet to the elegant white hand that held the pencil, and the graceful neck and glossy raven curls that drooped over the paper. 'Now,' thought I, 'if I had but pencil and a morsel of paper, I could make a lovelier sketch than hers, admitting I had the power to delineate faithfully what is before me' (64).

As with before, this description of the woman artist at work is overtly and unnecessarily sexualised by the male viewer. This is revealed through the manner in which he fragments and objectifies her body, highlighting her 'elegant white hand and 'graceful neck'. The fact that he shows such little interest in Helen's work is satirised by his description of her 'raven curls' 'droop[ing] over the paper', as if he is attempting to displace the art object with the artist herself. Furthermore, his assertion that he 'could make a lovelier sketch than hers' is not only arrogant considering that Helen is a serious working artist, but it further demonstrates his desire to turn her from creative subject into art object.

As with Osborn's painting, we can see how the inclusion of the male gaze helps create a sympathetic viewpoint of the protagonist by dramatizing the way in which women are limited in their attempts to assert themselves as creative subjects. In turn, this then challenges wider status quo assumptions of women's position in society. For instance, the commonly perceived notion that, "[T]he ideal feminine nature was passive, submissive and non-creative; the woman who exhibited her own art to the world was also dangerously putting something of herself on exhibition", is turned on its head by bringing the position of the male spectator into the image as it forces the reader/viewer to

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<sup>8</sup> Antonia Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), p.54.

<sup>9</sup> Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature*, p.54.

re-assess who the producer of this dangerous 'exhibition' is.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, both painting and novel can be said to deal with "the conditions in which a bourgeois woman's respectability and career are endangered".<sup>11</sup> Notably, career and respectability are aligned here, and this highlights what I believe to be the central significance of Helen's position as an artist. Although the visual arts provide a suitable opportunity to explore gender power imbalances through a scopic relationship that, as Losano and Cherry reveal, the Victorian reader would have been familiar with, what is of central significance to Helen's representation as an artist is not her professionalism or the art itself, but that it positions her as a working woman in a class-specific role.

Certainly, understanding the type of working woman Helen represents is crucial to understanding the anxieties she signals and how Brontë manages them, and it is thus in want of proper clarification. As we saw in the introduction, critics such as Antonia Losano have freely labelled Helen as a 'professional' female painter simply because she earns money: "Helen paints for money, which marks her as a professional artist", "Brontë's vision of Helen Graham's artistic development (from turtledove-drawing amateur to moneymaking professional)".<sup>12</sup> Losano is correct in contextualising "the transition from amateur, accomplished woman to professional female artist" as "a historical transition that is in its earliest stages at precisely the moment of the writing and publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*".<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, her assumption that in dealing with a female artist Brontë is directly referring to this emerging professional figure overlooks women's continued marginal relationship to the professional institutions of the arts at the time this novel was set, as well as bypassing the specific relationship between work, desire and the middle-class woman Brontë curates.<sup>14</sup>

Deborah Cherry's study explores changing definitions of professionalism occurring in the mid-nineteenth century as "[N]ew institutions and language were formed for the middle-class occupations which emerged alongside the older professions of the law, medicine and the church".<sup>15</sup> This was a

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<sup>10</sup> Jane Sellars, 'Art and the Artist as Heroine in the Novels of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 20:2 (1990), pp.57-76 (p.65).

<sup>11</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.80.

<sup>12</sup> Antonia Losano, 'The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 58:1 (2003), pp.1-41 (p.27,17).

<sup>13</sup> Losano, 'The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', p.5.

<sup>14</sup> Clarissa Campbell Orr notes the complexities of this status where she writes, "[E]ven though there are numerous women from the middle classes who entered the public sphere by painting for money, they were not given the accolade of full professional recognition because they were excluded from membership in professional associations such as the Royal Academy, or the Society of Painters in Watercolour. Their work was therefore not fully 'public', but could be classified either as 'woman's work', or as a 'trade' rather than a profession". Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'Introduction', in Clarissa Campbell Orr ed. *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester & New York, Manchester University Press: 1995), pp.1-30 (p.6).

<sup>15</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.9.

particularly changeable time for women as 'professionalism', which was for centuries "produced as masculine by the formation of organisations which trained and preferred men to assumed positions of power in civic and public administration" and which had "proved resistant to the training and recognition of professional women", was from the 1840s being challenged through, in the arts for example, the formation of societies for women artists and campaigning for access to formal art schools.<sup>16</sup> Although Helen is clearly not an amateur artist as by monetising on her skillset she exceeds "middle-class women's education of the domestic practice of drawing and watercolours as an accomplishment, a component of femininity", the status of the professional in the nineteenth century involved a level of training and education that justified its status which Helen does not possess.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Cherry also notes that professional artists were marked by their ability to exhibit. She describes how by

the mid-century women artists ambitious for professional success sent their major works to the Royal Academy, reserving smaller studies and sketched for other London venues, including the Society of Female Artists [...] According to one contemporary commentator it was the acceptance of a commission and her participation in the market of sale and exhibition which marked a woman artist's professional practice of art.<sup>18</sup>

Although Helen does sell her art she does not participate in exhibition. In fact, as we will consider later, she is removed from public participation in selling her work as this role is adopted by her brother, Frederick Lawrence.

However, we can look to the type of paintings Helen produces to clarify her working status. For instance, she is most frequently depicted in the early stages of production 'sketching' in pencil. When in her makeshift studio at the beginning of the novel, Gilbert notices, "several sketches in various stages of progression" (52) about the room. In the following scene when he watches her by the brook, he describes her, "sketch-book in her hand" (47), and later watches her as she "sketched away in silence" (64) by the seafront. As Dennis Denisoff notes, amateur female artists "were encouraged to dabble in watercolors and sketches rather than the more valued medium of oils", and thus Helen's sketching can be considered part of an appropriate study of art as a feminine domestic accomplishment.<sup>19</sup> However, as the reader is aware at this stage that Helen is already a financially

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<sup>16</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.53.

<sup>17</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.9.

<sup>18</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.96-97.

<sup>19</sup> Dennis Denisoff, 'Lady in Green with Novel: The Gendered Economics of the Visual Arts and Mid-Victorian Women's Writing', in Nicole Diane Thompson ed. *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.151-169 (p.152).

viable painter, the sketch more likely reflects a preparatory process associated with artistic training and production.

Alison Byerly has noted how the sketch underwent a change in perception during the time in which Brontë was writing as it became associated with the commercial artist. She reveals, “sketch subjects were often chosen according to the interests of an anticipated buyer”, “the sketch often represented a tangible record of the artist’s economic coercion, its subject matter dictated, not by the artist’s own taste and judgement, but by the desires of the buyer”.<sup>20</sup> That Helen possesses numerous unfinished sketches in “various stages of progression” (42) suggests that she is producing a large quantity of artwork for commercial purposes. Furthermore, the generic topics of Helen’s paintings, “landscapes, figures and sentimental pictures of children”, as Jane Sellars notes, reflect commercial rather than creative or experimental ambition, implying that she too has the interests and desires of buyers in mind.<sup>21</sup> This is an important distinction as by recognising Helen to be a commercial rather than amateur or professional artist, her relationship to art is removed from association with self-expression and personal desire and can be considered as more pragmatic and financially driven.

By conforming to a ‘needy lady’ role and not pushing the boundaries of professionalism, Helen can be seen to represent a far less subversive figure than some have considered. Indeed, at a time when women “were thought incapable of originality and relegated to the role of copyists” and when “the female amateur” was seen as separate “from the masculine world of anticommercial, anticonsumer High Art”, Helen upholds the status quo by representing the consumer-driven commercial artist.<sup>22</sup> However, this allows for what Brontë may have considered a necessary disassociation from desire. Indeed, the removal of desire from the painting process appears to be something Brontë was keen to disassociate Helen with from the novel’s very beginning. For instance, when Gilbert first enters Wildfell Hall to meet the mysterious new tenant, he is affronted by the peculiar set up of her domestic environment. He exclaims, “[T]o our surprise, we were ushered into a room where the first object that met the eye was a painter’s easel” (42). Gilbert’s surprise comes from the displacement of the domestic space as instead of being met by a homely parlour he enters a makeshift artist’s studio where chairs have to be hauled from “the artistical lumber” that “usurped” (42) their proper place. He also notes how Helen, “found it impossible to wean her attention entirely from her occupation to fix on her guests” (42). Helen can be seen to go against the expected female

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<sup>20</sup> Alison Byerly, ‘Effortless Art: The Sketch in Nineteenth-Century Painting and Literature’, *Criticism*, 41:3 (1993), pp.349-364 (p.351,352).

<sup>21</sup> Sellars, ‘Art and the Artist as Heroine in the Novels of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë’, p.71.

<sup>22</sup> Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature*, p.24.



role of provider of domestic comfort and hospitality and is instead depicted as consumed by her work and reluctant to entertain.

However, this seems only to be set up to encourage the reader's initial suspicion in her character, as Brontë does not continue with this representation. Indeed, Helen is sure to place economic coercion before a personal desire for creative self-expression as she reveals she "cannot afford to paint for my own amusement" (43). Comments like these are made throughout the narrative. For instance, she later declares to Gilbert that, "I almost wish I were not a painter [...] instead of delivering myself up to the full enjoyment of [nature] as others do, I am always troubling my head about how I could produce the same effect upon canvas" (83), a comment that directly abdicates her from a desire to work financially as an artist. Helen further renounces herself from association with traditionally unfeminine ambition later in the text when she comments, "[B]rilliant success, of course, I did not look for" (356), a statement which once again distances her from a personal or professional pursuit of excellence and negates desire by depicting her as content with her lot. Although Losano reads Helen's attitude in these aforementioned scenes as indicative of a, "preoccupied and grumpy genius, toiling away at a painting with no time for society", and thus linking her to the later 1850s image of the bohemian Pre-Raphaelite group to further her status as a 'professional', it is more probable to suggest that Helen's attitude and sketching practices reflect an indigent, commercially driven working woman whose discontent stems from economic pressures and the necessity of productive labour, rather than from a romanticised struggle towards artistic or expressive idealism.<sup>23</sup>

However, Losano's description can be said to be suited to a Brontë protagonist who possesses a creative "spiritual eye" and who "exist[s] in a kind of artist's dreamland" (154) such as Jane Eyre. Jane's relationship to art makes an interesting comparison to Helen's as although it is the latter who is the painter by occupation, it is the former who is far more likely to be credited for the power of her artistic vision or associated with an artist's drive. As we saw in the introduction, some critics have said that the visual dominates over the written word in *Jane Eyre* as the protagonist produces "word paintings" and relies heavily on the conjuring of visual images.<sup>24</sup> But as we will consider, this is the opposite of what Anne Brontë promotes as she encourages a distrusting of visual representation and favours the written word as a means through which her protagonist asserts her presence and authority in the text. We also saw how Jane's art is used symbolically to reveal her desires and even reflect her potential narrative path. However, with Helen's paintings ekphrasis description, "the verbal representation of visual representation", is, for the most part, absent in order to draw attention to

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<sup>23</sup> Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature*, p.79.

<sup>24</sup> Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars, *The Art of the Brontës* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.56.

the social significance of production rather than the art itself.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, as we will shortly see, Anne Brontë is highly critical of the use of art for revealing aspects of the self.

However, one of the primary reasons that Jane is free to express self and desire through her art, telling Rochester that the painting of her three portfolio pictures was “was one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known” (154), is due to the fact that art never becomes a source of income for her and thus, by extension, her desire is never ‘for sale’ in the way that is implied by Helen’s position as a working woman. Thus before we are too critical of the lack of desire in Helen’s relationship to her art, we must consider how Brontë demonstrates that even when undesiring, the very act of working for money is enough to spark doubts over her moral status in patriarchal society. Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century when Brontë was writing her novel, the topic of women’s work encompassed not only discussions on which occupations were appropriate for women, but also the varying degree of necessity for their transition from the home to the workplace. As Mary Poovey explains in her seminal study, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, “[A]lmost every advocate of expanding women’s employment shared two crucial assumptions [...] that women would work only out of necessity and that every occupation was appropriate to a specific class”.<sup>26</sup> Whilst positions such as servants or factory workers were more readily accepted amongst impoverished or working-class women, albeit not without arousing anxieties of their own, the middle-class woman’s relationship to work presented a far greater risk to coveted domestic ideology which considered women’s ‘natural role’ as home-makers and guardians of the home as a space of moral sanctity.

Poovey notes that desire became particularly troubling when combined with work as the exchanging of money for women’s services threatened to associate them with the unnatural sexual appetite and economic power of the prostitute. Anne Brontë raises the issue of the potential for the working woman’s sexual corruption in the studio-parlour scene when Gilbert, recognising Helen become “startled” by a movement at the window, notices “the skirts of a man’s coat vanishing behind a large holly bush” (38) outside. When Helen returns from inspecting her visitor she explains it was merely someone “come about the pictures”, yet Gilbert and his sister are notably suspicious as the latter comments, “I don’t know what to make of her, at all” (44). As Cherry writes of *Nameless and Friendless*, “[T]he depiction of a woman acting as a trader rather than a customer contravened predominant definitions of a ‘lady’: women’s economic independence was often considered a sign of

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<sup>25</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.152.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.158.

impropriety, or even sexual deviancy”.<sup>27</sup> Brontë attempts to mitigate this issue by having Helen’s son explain that, “Mamma sends all her pictures to London [...] and somebody sells them there for her, and sends us the money” (43). This is a clear attempt at removing Helen from direct contact with the potentially sexually corruptive male public sphere, keeping her role as artist safely within the bounds of women’s ‘proper sphere’, the home. This provides another example of how Helen’s potentially subversive representation is actually limited in order for Brontë to maintain Helen within a respectable image of femininity.

Indeed, by working only out of the necessity of supporting her child, as a ‘needy lady’ figure Helen conforms to the prevailing domestic ideology of the time which endorsed women’s ‘selflessness’. This was a characteristic that became central to cultural perceptions of femininity in the nineteenth century and allowed for women’s roles in philanthropy and education to flourish. The creation of the notion of the self-sacrificing woman is one that has been credited to one of the nineteenth century’s most popular writers on domestic conduct, Sarah Stickney Ellis.<sup>28</sup> As she states in *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*, which was first published in 1839,

It is necessary for her to lay aside all her natural caprice, her love of self-indulgence, her vanity, her indolence – in short, her very self [...] to spend her mental and moral capabilities in devising means for promoting the happiness of others, while her own derives a remote and secondary existence from theirs.<sup>29</sup>

As Ellis reveals, women’s personal happiness was expected not only to come second to their families, but to be directly derived from their role in ensuring the happiness and wellbeing of others and certainly not from sources outside of the home. Brontë gets around the tricky process of representing a working woman by anticipating the anxieties she would arouse and responding to them by making Helen a non-desiring commercial artist who works solely to support herself and her child financially.

It is perhaps easy to take issue with Brontë’s choice here. Indeed, the image she presents to the reader at the beginning of the novel of Helen in her makeshift artist’s studio, renouncing her domestic role and unable to even efficiently entertain her guests due to her preoccupation with her work, is a subversive image of an independent working woman that critics have tried to find sustained throughout the novel but which the author only appears to justify and mediate for the rest of the

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<sup>27</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.79.

<sup>28</sup> See Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), p.185.

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The select works of Mrs. Ellis: comprising The Women of England, Wives of England, Daughters of England, Poetry of life, &c., designed to promote the cultivation of the domestic virtues* (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1843), p.15-16. [accessed online at [hathitrust.org](http://hathitrust.org) 12/11/19].

narrative. However, when Helen's diary is revealed in the middle of the novel, the reader is presented with an account of her relationship to art as it developed from the experiences of her youth. Thus far we have only considered Helen's relationship to art as it has been presented in the outer narrative and through Gilbert's perspective, and it is therefore necessary to consider what is revealed through Helen's own first-person account. Helen's diary reveals the history of how she got to be in her position as a single mother and working woman. This story of how she meets and eventually flees from her neglectful, alcohol-dependent husband Arthur Huntingdon is paralleled to her relationship with art which begins as ambitious and self-reflective and eventually becomes commercially directed and pragmatic. Ultimately, it is a journey that tracks Helen's journey from lack of control to control over her representation.

Helen's diary takes us back in the chronological history of narrative events to her early courtship with Arthur Huntingdon, ending shortly after she meets Gilbert at Wildfell Hall. As previously addressed, one of the ways Brontë fastens Helen's status as a financially driven working artist rather than Losano's bohemian professional-type is by removing desire from the production process and replacing it with necessity. However, Helen's diary reveals that she has not always had such a pragmatic relationship to art. Her diary opens with the exclamation that, "I cannot enjoy my books, because they have no power to arrest my attention [...] My drawing suits me best, for I can draw and think at the same time" (127). Until this point in the narrative the adult Helen has expressed no motivation for painting outside of financial obligation and has, as we will later see, favoured the written word as means for self-expression. It is thus necessary to note that her youthful journal opens with her preferences in reverse. However, Brontë suggests that art is a fitting medium for Helen's adolescent mind which at this point is interested mostly in surface aesthetics, confirmed by her obsessive sketching of her love interest, Arthur Huntingdon: "there is one face I am always trying to paint or to sketch [...] As for the owner of that face, I cannot get him out of my mind—and, indeed, I never try" (127). That when painting she is able to 'think at the same time' also suggests that art is a medium that allows for the gratification of the obsessive romantic reverie that Helen indulges in. In her early artistic practice, we thus see that Helen channels desire into her work, but she soon learns the disadvantages of such a bold expression of emotions.

For instance, Helen records an early scene before the commencement of her courtship with Arthur when, tired of socialising, she leaves a party and enters the library to work on a painting in solitude. Here we receive a detailed ekphrastic description of the work from Helen's perspective, the first and only in the novel:

I intended it to be my masterpiece, though it was somewhat presumptuous in the design [...] I had endeavoured to convey the idea of a sunny morning. I had ventured to give more of the bright verdure of spring or early summer to the grass and foliage than is commonly attempted in painting [...] A group of dark Scotch firs was introduced in the middle distance to relieve the prevailing freshness of the rest; but in the foreground was part of the gnarled trunk and of the spreading boughs of a large forest-tree, whose foliage was of a brilliant golden green—not golden from autumnal mellowness, but from the sunshine and the very immaturity of the scarce expanded leaves. Upon this bough, that stood out in bold relief against the sombre firs, were seated an amorous pair of turtle doves whose soft sad-coloured plumage afforded a contrast of another nature; beneath it a young girl was kneeling on the daisy-spangled turf, with head thrown back and masses of fair hair falling on her shoulders, her hands clasped, lips parted, and eyes intently gazing upward in pleased yet earnest contemplation of those feathered lovers—too deeply absorbed in each other to notice her [...] (156).

It was recognised earlier that Jane Eyre's detailed ekphrastic descriptions of her artwork were used as a means of expressing her psychological and emotional inner world. This would confirm Losano's claim that, "[D]escriptions of women's paintings by women writers are rather an attempt to consolidate female power; by controlling ekphrastic description, these writers attempt to control interpretation as well".<sup>30</sup> But whilst this applies to Charlotte's novel, in Anne's it is clear to see that Helen's own perception of her work is in opposition to the image presented to the reader, thus encouraging doubt over her abilities of visual discernment.

Indeed, Helen refers to this arguably hackneyed composition as her 'masterpiece', yet despite her attempt to paint from imagination like Jane Eyre, her subject matter is unoriginal, "it is exactly what a lady would have painted", Jane Sellars notes, "landscapes, figures and sentimental pictures of children".<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Helen herself recognises the 'presumptuous' design of the piece and how she undertakes more 'than is commonly attempted in painting' in her colouring. These over-reaching qualities imply a gratuitous confidence that forewarns the reader of difficulties that will soon arise from the protagonist's overt trust in her own misled ability for visual discernment. Shortly after, Arthur Huntingdon enters the room to offer his opinion on the painting. He proclaims the piece to be "a very fitting study for a young lady – Spring just opening into summer—morning just approaching noon—girlhood just ripening into womanhood", before questioning why the fair subject does not have Helen's dark hair, claiming "I should fall in love with her if I hadn't the artist before me" (157). On the

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<sup>30</sup> Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature*, p.12.

<sup>31</sup> Sellars, 'Art and the Artist as Heroine in the Novels of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë', p.71.

one hand, like Gilbert, Arthur projects his own desires onto the image by assuming the female subject to be an autobiographical depiction of the artist and thus perpetuates the gendered assumption that women can only work in a confessional vein. Yet on the other hand, Helen's painting of the 'amorous pair of turtle doves' and beautiful young girl with 'masses of fair hair' and parted lips is stereotypically romantic and does invite the kind of symbolic reading of 'girlhood ripening into womanhood' that Arthur puts forth.

At this stage, Helen's work is thus clearly befitting of a middle-class amateur female artist who learns to draw and paint as part of a proper domestic education as Arthur's comment, 'a very fitting study for a young lady', confirms. These early insights help to signal that although in her adolescent mind she may have been working on a creative 'masterpiece', Helen actually journeys from a common position of genteel domestic artist to an equally middling and class-appropriate position as a commercial artist. Arthur continues his reading of the painting by stating of the subject, "she's thinking there will come a time when she will be wooed and won like that pretty hen-dove [...] how tender and faithful he will find her", to which Helen replies, "[A]nd perhaps [...] how tender and faithful she shall find him" (157). As Arthur's biographical interpretation makes clear, this conversation is clearly symbolic of their own developing relationship. Yet when he returns with a mocking response, "[P]erhaps, for there is no limit to the wild extravagance of Hope's imaginings at such an age" (157), Helen fails to register this evident rebuke of her suggestion for an equal tenderness between man and woman. As by this point the reader is already aware that Helen eventually leaves Arthur due to his irresolvable behaviour, her inability to register this early warning sign of his character implies that her vision is not as perceptive or fine-tuned as she believes.

Furthermore, as Brontë encourages us to question Helen's artistic vision she correspondingly demonstrates the damaging potential art holds as a medium in potentially revealing more than the artist intended. Indeed, once completed and thus outside of her creative control, Helen's art is available within a system of interpretation that can be made public and contingent to the subjective eye. For instance, in a scene of typical parlour entertainment in which the women display various forms of feminine accomplishment, Miss Wilmot is "called upon to sing and play for the amusement of the company" whilst Helen is requested "to exhibit [her] drawings" (152) to the group. However, when Arthur Huntingdon looks at the reverse of her portfolio she exclaims, "to my horror, [I] beheld him complacently gazing at the *back* of the picture – It was his own face that I had sketched there and forgotten to rub out!" (152). Helen's 'horror' at the discovery of her private sketches is then followed by the "agony" (152) of an attempted retrieval of the portfolio which Arthur does not permit. Helen is sure "he despises me, because he knows I love him", and with a "delighted chuckle" (153) emphasising

his satisfaction, Arthur proceeds to ignore her for the rest of the evening. From what clearly originated as a casual and harmless reflection of girlish desire, Helen's sketch transforms into "an eternal monument to his pride and my humiliation!" (154) when in the wrong hands.

That Helen's sketch is comprised of a public front and a hidden, private reverse implies a disjunction between art's 'proper' and 'improper' usages. For instance, in its intension as a display of domestic accomplishment in this scene, Helen is not supposed to paint what she desires, but rather produce something intended to demonstrate her skill and be pleasing to the eye as female "accomplishments were intended to arouse masculine desire".<sup>32</sup> Brontë reveals the danger in neglecting the social code and slipping into the use of art as an expressive medium as Helen delivers the message that by being too readable, too open to interpretation by allowing her feeling to be discovered, Arthur is able to gain power in their relationship and use Helen's emotional visibility against her. This is emphasised in a further and nearly identical scene where Arthur discovers and attempts to steal "a small oval ivory paper [...] a complete miniature portrait" (157) of himself. However, the language used here is increasingly violent as he demands of Helen's portfolio, "[L]et me have its bowels then" (157), suggesting that the forceful retrieval of her personal sketches and the subsequent revealing of her desire is akin to the brutalising of her body, a figurative murder or rape.

In this instance, Arthur's violent act encourages a comparably violent response from Helen who resists his attempted possession of her artwork as she declares, "I insist upon having that back! It is mine, and you have no right to take this", before she "tore it in two, and threw it into the fire" (158). Helen results to destroying her art to deny Arthur the symbolic possession of her emotions shows, an uncomfortable concept that is reflected in the narrative more widely as Helen can be seen to constantly mediate herself as her only way to access power. This is an issue we will consider in terms of the sacrificing of her voice to the male narrator later in this chapter. For now, despite Arthur's actions, Helen goes on to marry him, and the majority of her diary reveals how his initial roguish charm simply masked a hidden brutality, one that the reader may have anticipated but that Helen seems, as she later states in her own words, "wilfully blind" (203) to. However, as Helen begins to see Arthur for who he really is, metaphors are employed that imply Helen's developing vision.

Indeed, Helen begins to consider whether "it is not he that I love; it is a creature of my own imagination" (149), a phrase that suggests that she was not 'seeing' Arthur at all. Then, in an earlier scene she describes herself as "an excellent physiognomist", "I always judge of people's characters by their looks – not by whether they are handsome or ugly, but by the general cast of the countenance"

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<sup>32</sup> Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.184.

(133). However, she later reveals to her friend that Arthur's "head looked right enough, but when he placed my hand on the top of it, it sunk in a bed of curls, rather alarmingly low, especially in the middle" (206). Arthur's low skull reveals the possession of a shrunken brain and therefore the degenerative qualities that explain his immoral behaviour and alcohol addiction. This has been noted by Marianne Thormählen who recognised that Arthur represented the 'drunk of choice' outlined in Robert Macnish's *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* (1832) who "have usually a ruddy complexion, thick neck, small head, and strong muscular fibre".<sup>33</sup> However, this knowledge requires a phrenological rather than physiognomic reading, which explains why Helen was unable to detect Arthur's deficits early on. The difference, as Sally Shuttleworth explains, "[gives] rise to distinct power dynamics", as whereas Helen's physiognomic reading is "based on an extension of intuitive understanding, and thus on evidence open for all to see", phrenology leads to a deeper understanding of character by "operat[ing] according to a set of rules which were closed to the uninitiated" and was thus the more scientific of the two.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, that "physiognomy merely recast in the verbal terms the unambiguous statement imprinted in the features", whereas, "phrenology delved below the surface, examining the secrets of a psyche", further links Helen's initial preoccupation with surface aesthetics over inner character to her naïve vision and inability to recognise the signs of degeneration in Arthur early on.<sup>35</sup>

However, Helen does eventually come to see Arthur for who he truly is, and the success of her matured vision is confirmed through various comparisons Brontë makes between scenes in the outer text that show Helen's advancement in comparison to the inner diary narrative of her youth. For instance, in one scene Helen reflects upon a painting she made of Arthur in her youth. Here she is offered the chance for a rereading and to conclusively demonstrate her new clarity of vision. Looking upon the painting some years later, she describes,

[H]ow widely different had been my feelings in painting that portrait to what they now were in looking upon it! How I had studied and toiled to produce something, as I thought, worthy of the original! what mingled pleasure and dissatisfaction I had had in the result of my labours!—pleasure for the likeness I had caught; dissatisfaction, because I had not made it handsome enough. Now, I see no beauty in it—nothing pleasing in any part of its expression (398).

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<sup>33</sup> Marianne Thormählen, 'The Villain of Wildfell Hall: Aspects and Prospects of Arthur Huntingdon', *MLR*, 88:4 (1993), pp. 832–33 (p.832).

<sup>34</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.68,69.

<sup>35</sup> Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p.69.



Helen here notes that her intent when producing the image was to convey something ‘worthy of the original’, a convincing ‘likeness’ of Arthur. The concept of ‘likeness’ is referred to in relation to both people and portraiture in *Tenant* and was an artistic term originally used to praise the accuracy of representation but which, as we saw in the introduction, underwent revaluation in the late eighteenth century. As by the time Brontë was writing likeness no longer relied on a surface-level aesthetic accuracy, it is clear to see how it came to be associated with “the hazardous opacity of interpretation, and the inevitable subjectivity involved in assessing character”.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, although the image of Arthur has not physically altered and despite Helen’s assertion of its mimetic accuracy, she notes her changed emotional response which strips it of the beauty it once possessed, confirming the subjectivity of interpretation. Certainly, that it is Arthur’s external ‘beauty’ that this picture once depicted does not mean that aesthetic ‘likeness’ reflects any ‘truth’ of character, as Helen herself learns.

Another comparison between the outer and inner texts is visible in the changed treatment of art as an expressive medium. As we saw previously, Helen makes a mistake by revealing too much of herself and her desires through her art and Brontë reveals how society punishes the woman who makes her desire overly discernible. Thus in the outer narrative when Gilbert questions one of Helen’s paintings by asking, “why have you called it Fernley Manor, Cumberland, instead of Wildfell Hall, — shire?”, she reveals she has, “take[n] the precaution to give a false name to the place” and signed it with “false initials” (43). This is a direct contrast to her earlier portraits of Arthur as the mature Helen tries to obscure her identity and any trace of personal discernment as a means of self-preservation. Furthermore, Brontë mirrors the scene in the diary where Arthur studies the private reverse of Helen’s sketches in an interaction with Gilbert where he comparably notices, “a picture that the artist [had] turned to the wall” (45), which he then proceeds to study. However, Helen’s emotional response is markedly changed. Whereas before she unknowingly encouraged Arthur’s enjoyment of his discovery, (her outrage and attempts to reclaim the image notably “mak[ing] matters worse” (152)), this time Gilbert’s “great act of impertinence” (45) is met with the declaration, “I beg you will ask nothing about it, for your curiosity will not be gratified” (45), a contrastingly authoritative and controlled response that marks Helen’s emotional maturity.

Alexandra Wettlaufer has noted that by refusing to explain her painting to Gilbert and appease his curiosity, Helen “[retains] control over representation, she also controls the system of interpretation and will not relinquish the key to the signified”.<sup>37</sup> This fight for control over

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<sup>36</sup> Joe Bray, ‘The Language of Portraiture in The Early Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Study in Opie and Austen’, *Women's Writing*, 23 (2016), pp.53–67 (p.63).

<sup>37</sup> Alexandra Wettlaufer, *Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Painting and the Novel in France and Britain, 1800–1860* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), p.233.

representation formed the basis of the power conflict she endured with Arthur who persistently attempted to control her by either stifling her artistic expression or using it against her. The mature Helen, however, retains control by no longer making herself readable and keeping the status of her desires and emotions under cover. We see a similar retreat from expression when Helen's self-representation is relinquished from her control through gossip. Gossip, like art, is a mode of representation that Brontë employs to highlight the ways in which women are unjustly misunderstood and misrepresented in society. Indeed, if painting threatens with anxieties of women's public visibility and misrepresentation in *Tenant*, then gossip can be seen to threaten as a mode of free-moving public discourse in which self-representation cannot be controlled or monitored, signalling comparable issues over interpretation and self-fashioning.

## GOSSIP

Although the structure of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is best remembered for its narration through diary and letters, Jan B. Gordon has drawn attention to the fact that "the first ten chapters of the novel are really nothing more than the attempt of gossip to come to terms with meaning".<sup>38</sup> As Brontë shrouds Helen's history in speculation, it is clear to see how gossip, as an indeterminate and unreliable method of accessing information, is used to increase the sense of mystery around who Helen is. Most significantly, however, this form of representation is used to highlight just how quickly society jumps to assuming negatively about a woman who does not immediately conform to expectations. The reader's first encounter with Helen Graham is through gossip as Gilbert begins his tale by inviting us to "go back with me to the autumn of 1827" (7) where he describes a domestic scene in which his sister, having returned from visiting the Wilson and Millward families, shares with her own "an important piece of news" (10). Hearing that "a single lady" has taken up residency at the neighbouring Wildfell Hall, the family delight in speculation over the status and character of the "mysterious" (10) tenant.

During the time in which Brontë was writing, gossip was a form of oral discourse most commonly associated with women and the lower classes and linked to anxieties concerning the fragility of the domestic sphere. As Anthea Trodd explores, crime fiction of the period often expressed concerns surrounding the spreading of gossip between private and public spheres by servants. Due to their potential 'fly on the wall' access to "the household's dark secret" which they had the power to "control or reveal", servants threatened "the privacy of the home, both as internal intruders and as

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<sup>38</sup> Jan B. Gordon, 'Gossip, Diary, Letter, Text: Anne Brontë's Narrative *Tenant* and the Problematic of the Gothic sequel', *ELH*, 51:4 (1984), pp.719-745 (p.722).

publicists to the outside world".<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, in her breakthrough study, *Gossip*, Patricia Meyer Spacks considers how from as early as the Bible, "[W]omen's share in the fallen condition of humankind emphasized sins of talk and of lust", which contribute to the association of female orality with deception and corruption.<sup>40</sup> Through its association with women, gossip was then brought into correlation with the feminised private sphere in the nineteenth century with "the realm of serious discourse" belonging to the masculine public sphere where values of rationality and social and political progress stood in opposition to the idle connotations of 'women's talk'.<sup>41</sup>

In *Tenant*, Mr. Grimsby openly reflects societal beliefs that women are more prone to deception where he states: "[T]hey bring trouble and discomfort wherever they come, with their false, fair faces and their deceitful tongues" (296). By referencing women's 'false faces' alongside their 'deceitful tongues', Grimsby also confirms the hierarchy of legitimate representation as established by the novel as the oral and the visual are comparably associated with unreliable representation. Although Brontë's novel does recognise the role of the "tale-bearing servant" (428), these minor characters are often depicted as harmless tattlers or even prove to be advantageous in their position, as is the case with Helen's own maid-servant, Rachel, whose underhand access to household secrets allows her to warn Helen of Arthur's inappropriate relationship with Lady Lowborough. The real threat of gossip, Brontë suggests, lies in the potential for rumour-spreading and the tarnishing of reputation within middle-class society by those social equals whose respected voices hold the power to destroy or re-invent the public perception of their object. However, Brontë also shows that those who participate in gossip are not exclusively women as the two most potentially devastating instances of rumour-spreading originate from Eliza Millward, Gilbert Markham's initial love interest, but also Mr. Grimsby, Arthur's debauched bachelor friend.

Eliza claims she overhears rumours from servants as a means of deflecting her own association with gossiping, "I had it from a very authentic source [...] From one of the servants at Woodford" (428). However, as gossip raises the issue of the unreliable and potentially untraceable source, the author encourages us to treat Eliza's deflection with suspicion. Certainly, she hints vaguely to "shocking reports about Mrs. Graham" but refuses to disclose their details or origins: "Oh, don't ask me! I can't explain it" (75). Her sister, however, reveals that, "I never heard it till Eliza told me, the other day" (75), implying that Eliza may have fabricated the information. Similarly, when Eliza encourages Gilbert to note the "striking likeness" (76) between Helen's son and Mr. Frederick Lawrence, insinuating that one possible reason for her status as a single woman may have been banishment from her husband

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<sup>39</sup> Anthea Trodd, *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), p.8.

<sup>40</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1985), p.40.

<sup>41</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p.147.

due to an affair and the concealment of an illegitimate child, Gilbert replies, "I've heard *nothing*, except from you" (76), encouraging the reader to see Eliza's assertion as fabricated. When gossip is involved, Brontë is always sure to create a situation where the reader senses that its source cannot be trusted. This way, gossip serves to highlight how the non-conventional woman is at risk of falling under a false narrative. Indeed, as Beverly Gordon states, "[T]o fear gossip is to fear that one is becoming a character, an 'other,' in someone else's fiction".<sup>42</sup> As we will later consider, the revelation of Helen's diary later in the text serves to put her in control of her story and turn fiction to fact.

Although we rarely hear the specific content of gossip in these opening chapters, this serves to highlight that Brontë was less interested in the information gossip provides and more concerned with what the process reveals about female representation. This can be considered in a similar way to how ekphrasis detail of art is rarely explored in the novel, but the process of creating art is. One of the main consequences of gossip in the text is that it implicates Helen in suspicions of sexual impropriety. Patricia Spacks has looked in detail at the sexual implications of gossip as a mode of discourse. She states that, "even when it avoids the sexual" in topic, gossip "bears about it a faint flavour of the erotic" as "the atmosphere of erotic titillation suggests gossip's implicit voyeurism".<sup>43</sup> She furthers this by revealing that, "[L]ike sex, gossip serves impulse and has explosive potential. Passionate attacks on the secret life of words parallel warnings about the secret life of the body".<sup>44</sup> By putting Helen "into circulation as an object of community gossip", as Elizabeth Langland states, this implies that she is somewhat of a 'public' woman, a term that suggests sexual impropriety or even prostitution.<sup>45</sup> The category of prostitute at the time Brontë was writing was not, as Lynda Nead explains, "fixed or internally coherent", but rather it was "accommodating and flexible and could define any woman who transgressed the bourgeois code of morality".<sup>46</sup> Gossip thus raises the issue, comparably to visual representation, of the way in which society unjustly castigates women of non-conforming social status whilst also highlighting the lack of control women have over their own representation and reputation.

As we have considered previously, as a working woman Helen raises concerns over women's sexual and economic power, a position that associates her with the subversive figure of the prostitute. This anxiety is furthered through gossip which repeatedly implicates Helen with adultery. Indeed,

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<sup>42</sup> Gordon, 'Gossip, Diary, Letter, Text: Anne Brontë's Narrative Tenant and the Problematic of the Gothic sequel', p.723.

<sup>43</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p.11.

<sup>44</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p.40.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Langland, 'The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', in Anthony H. Harris and Beverly Taylor ed. *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1992), pp.111-123 (p.114).

<sup>46</sup> Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representation of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford & New York: Blackwell, 1988), p.94.

scenes that explicitly use gossip to incriminate Helen in sexual misconduct also occur to further the suggestion that women are unfairly chastised. Through the rumour Mr. Grimsby threatens to perpetuate later in the novel, Brontë reveals the discriminatory differences between societal treatments of male and female attitudes to sexuality. This scene occurs in the diary section of the narrative and thus earlier in the chronological history of events when Helen and Arthur are at the height of their domestic turmoil. Here Arthur's friend, Walter Hargrave, romantically propositions Helen and despite her resistance the two are witnessed in a semi-embrace by Mr. Grimsby from the window, provoking Hargrave to declare, with "a gleam of malicious triumph", "[H]e will report what he has seen to Huntingdon and all the rest, with such embellishments as he thinks proper" (361). Hargrave's triumphant response stems from his belief that by 'embellishing' or manipulating the truth of the scene, Grimsby will convince Arthur of a pre-existing affair between himself and Helen and force their separation. The use of the word 'embellished' acts as a visual signifier that links gossip to the creation of a 'false picture' of events as once again Brontë associates the visual and the verbal with misrepresentation. This is furthered by the use of the window which, as we saw in the previous chapter, often signals misleading or misinterpreted communication.

Brontë reveals the unjust differences between male and female reputation by comparing the reception of Helen's implied affair with that of her husband's actual infidelity. At the time Brontë was writing, female adultery was considered a far greater threat to domestic ideology due to the potential for reproductive corruptibility and the illegitimate spoiling of blood lines. Furthermore, as Spacks reveals, "[R]eputation for women [...] is sexual reputation", whereas "[A] man's good name concerns behaviour in many situations".<sup>47</sup> Helen thus risks far more by being branded an adulterer than her husband and this injustice is acknowledged when Hattersley's warns Arthur, "true or false, you've no right to blame her" (364), highlighting the hypocrisy of his objection to his wife's supposed affair when he himself is a proved adulterer. Despite the fact that she is innocent, Helen is also the one who pleads, "when you hear my name belied and slandered, will you defend it?" (365), whereas her husband makes no attempts to defend himself against accusations of the same kind as he does not risk reputational ruin in the same way as his wife. This reveals Brontë's awareness of women's lack of control over their representation, and her awareness that they cannot respond to injustices in the same way as men.

As we have seen, the negative connotations of gossip mean that Helen cannot involve herself in it even to clear her own name. Helen and Eliza, (Gilbert's other potential love-interest), are compared in this way to reveal Helen's superiority. For instance, when Eliza engages in community

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<sup>47</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p.32.

gossip, Gilbert finds her “repugnant”, but Helen, “will not condescend to explain myself to one that can make a jest of such horrible suspicions” (123), and thus appears only the more virtuous and appealing for refusing to participate in gossip, even if it is to clear her own name. Like the way Helen retreats from artistic self-expression, that Brontë advocates here for a woman to remain silent in the face of injustice could be seen as problematic and antithetical to the text’s criticisms of society’s unjust expectations and assumptions of the female sex. However, Brontë justifies her choice through its necessity, revealing repeatedly how gossip and tattling “victimize women more seriously than they do men” as for the latter, their positions of social power and “continued opportunities for action may allow them to restore or remodel their reputations” autonomously.<sup>48</sup> Women on the other hand, lacking involvement, or at the very least authority in the public sphere, were not afforded the same opportunities for self-invention. This, coupled with the fact that female orality has long been associated with ‘idle chat’ and separated from “the realm of serious discourse” belonging to the male-dominated public sphere also provides support for why Brontë may have chosen to have her heroine’s innocence proved by, and her story told through, a socially licensing male narrator.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, Helen does eventually have her reputation cleared amongst the people of Linden-Carr and her position in abstaining from gossip helps her achieve this. Hearing the rumours concerning his love-interest, Gilbert sets out to “clear her name from these vile calumnies” (418) and “to prove the truth—or rather the falsehood of her story” (469). That he seeks not only to defend Helen’s reputation but to conclusively prove her innocence leads him to her diary where, as we will shortly see, the written word provides the authoritative and conclusive evidence that confirms Helen’s innocence and redeems her character in the eyes of society and, comparably, in the eyes of the reader. Considering this, we can therefore interpret Helen’s reserved behaviour as a careful and clever manipulation of her role as she understands the limitations and powers of her sex and uses them to her benefit.

Brontë’s use of the legitimising male frame narrator is not unlike her sister Emily’s; they are, as Naomi Jacobs and Arlene Jackson state, an “authorial strategy for dealing with the unacceptability of the subject matter”, but implemented “not without some irony” on the part of the authors.<sup>50</sup> Jacobs best describes this when she acknowledges that the structure,

serves several functions that are strongly gender-related: it exemplifies a process, necessary for both writer and reader, of passing through or going behind the official version of reality in

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<sup>48</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p.32.

<sup>49</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p.147.

<sup>50</sup> Naomi M. Jacobs, ‘Gendered and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 16:3 (1986), pp.204-219 (p.110)., Arlene M. Jackson, ‘The Question of Credibility in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, *English Studies*, 63:3 (1982), pp.198-206 (p.201).

order to approach a truth that the culture prefers to deny; it exemplifies the ways in which domestic reality is obscured by layers of conventional ideology; and it replicates a cultural split between male and female spheres that is shown to be at least one source of the tragedy at the center of the fictional world.<sup>51</sup>

Seeing these frame narrators as a necessary yet criticised lens of officiation through which the true female centre of the texts must be accessed certainly seems to be in keeping with what we have discovered thus far. Indeed, Catherine's ghost represents the unruly 'centre', (or lack thereof), of *Wuthering Heights* who undermines the order and rationality of Lockwood's attempts at narration. Furthermore, the basic narrative structure of *Tenant* which places the diary quite literally at the centre of the male epistolary narration also suggests that there is a central female truth to be accessed.

However, the source of power for these two women is very different. As we saw in the second chapter, for Emily, power comes from female disruption and disorder, yet the opposite must be declared for Anne. We have seen thus far that she rewards her heroine for conforming to ideals of reserved, self-sacrificing feminine display. The 'hunger, rebellion and rage' of Charlotte's Jane Eyre or the violent self-destruction of Emily's Catherine Earnshaw are notably different from Helen's response to the injustices of society. And yet in some ways they are similar, also. Catherine subverts from a marginalised and hidden place as a ghost, and *Villette*'s Lucy Snowe refuses to be pinned down to an 'identity', avoiding association with her physical body to depict an alternative narrative focused on the display of female consciousness. *Tenant* is similar in these ways as Helen can also be seen to assert her power from a marginalised position in the text. However, rather than subverting expectations of femininity as a Brontë female protagonist might be expected to do, Helen conforms to and maintains ideals of a properly feminine and morally pure woman and in return, she is given power in the text in the areas of influence and reform, as this we will now consider. These were specifically female areas of power in the mid-nineteenth century and ones that were associated with domestic conduct books. As I will now reveal, Helen's own relationship to the written word can be explored to reveal her power of influence in the text. Indeed, whereas visual and oral representations were implemented to highlight unreliable and uncontrollable representation, the written word is employed to signal not only truth and reliability, but the ability for character reform.

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<sup>51</sup> Jacobs, 'Gendered and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', p.204.

## TEXT

We considered previously how Gilbert opens his narrative with an invitation to travel back in time to Helen's arrival at Linden-Carr. The opening scenes depict her arrival through gossip, but before this Gilbert first sets up the epistolary narrative structure. Indeed, we first learn that Gilbert Markham has offered to return the favour of a history of his youth to his friend and brother-in-law, Jack Halford. The various references to letters and journals in this opening correspondence work to establish trust and authority in the written word. For instance, Gilbert assures his friend that, "looking over certain musty old letters and papers" has got him "in a very proper frame of mind" (6) for telling his story. He reinforces his credibility by referencing "a certain old faded journal" which he "mentions by way of assurance that I have not memory alone – tenacious as it is – to depend on" (6). This is then contrasted with the gossip that saturates the beginning of his tale which, like the role of art, is concerned with signalling unreliable representation. Through this introduction, there is an association between truth and the written word that continues in the narrative thereafter.

Previously we saw how Helen's relationship with art changes drastically through her journey from self-expressive amateur painter to astute commercial artist. However, one method of self-articulation that remains consistent throughout her life is writing. Indeed, Helen is associated with various forms of the written word as alongside her journaling and letter writing she is often described busying herself with reading. As she reveals in her diary, "[T]he reading and answering of my letters, and the direction of household concerns afforded me ample employment for the morning: after lunch I got my drawing, and from dinner till bedtime, I read" (212). That Helen finds enjoyment and even respite in these pursuits, "when I cease writing, I find my head aches terribly" (209), is contrasted with her husband who, "never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines" (209), and is always "at a loss for something to amuse him or to occupy his time" (212). Thus when Helen wishes for "anything to occupy his head or his hands for a few hours a day, and give him something besides his own pleasure to think about" (226), she evokes the familiar Christian Proverb, 'the Devil makes work for idle hands', and aligns Arthur's depraved behaviour with a lack of suitable occupation. Through these passages, reading and writing are associated with healthy behaviour which aids the reader's trust in the integrity of Helen's diary and the power it is afforded in educating and reforming others later in the text.

The educational function of Helen's diary has been long noted by critics, yet the type of influence it examples is greatly debated. Critics such as Melody Kemp have considered Helen's attempts at reforming her husband as an extension of a religious evangelism, and others such as Claire



O'Callaghan have seen it as a reflection of domestic ideology.<sup>52</sup> Although Maria Frawley has usefully demonstrated how these ideologies informed and grew out of one and other and therefore cannot be considered as distinct, Brontë can be seen to separate religious and domestic influence in the text to suggest a false sense of Helen's liberation from patriarchal structures.<sup>53</sup> What I mean by this is that in the beginning, Helen is marked by her attempts at active "salvation" (147) as she strives to be Arthur's spiritual saviour, a role Brontë condemns and depicts as unjust and unrealistic. Then, when Helen renounces this role, she goes on to have a covert influence of reform through "education" (387) in her diary, a less unfeasible but equally patriarchally-derived role.

If we begin by addressing Helen's relationship with Arthur, we can see from the outset that despite her aunt's warning that, "you should never be tempted to marry a man who was deficient in sense or principle, however handsome or charming in other respects he might be", Helen is resolved to the idea of "saving" her chosen suitor "from the consequences of his early errors" (145). When Helen cannot contend that Arthur is "a man of principle", her aunt asks if she "would willingly undertake to be his teacher?" (145). However, it is clear at this stage that Helen sees her role as less of an educator and more of a spiritual saviour. Indeed, the language used throughout her courtship with Arthur is imbued with religious terms. She tells her aunt, "if I hate the sins I love the sinner, and would do much for his salvation", whilst declaring variously: "I shall consider my life well spent in saving him from the consequences of his early errors, and striving to recall him to the path of virtue – God grant me success" (147); "[I]f he is now exposed to the baneful influence of corrupting and wicked companions, what glory to deliver him from them! – Oh! If I could believe that Heaven has designed me for this!" (150). Helen reflects how at the time, religion presented "marriage and homemaking" as positions which "would fulfil [women's] religious mission, and contribute towards the salvation of themselves and their families".<sup>54</sup> Her belief that 'Heaven has designed' her to 'deliver' Arthur from corruptive influence also reflects the previously acknowledged perceptions of women's spiritual superiority and purity introduced in the nineteenth century as a result of the separation of spheres.

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<sup>52</sup> Melody Kemp, 'Helen's Diary and the Method(ism) of Character Formation in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', in Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess ed. *New approaches to the literary art of Anne Brontë* (London & New York: Ashgate, 2001), pp.195-212., Claire O'Callaghan 'Killing the "Angel in the House": Violence and Victim-Blaming in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', in Barbara Leonardi ed. *Intersections of Gender, Class, and Race in the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp.297-32.

<sup>53</sup> Maria Frawley, 'The Female Saviour in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 20:3 (1991), p.133-143.

<sup>54</sup> Frances Knight, 'Male and Female He Created Them': Men, Women and the Question of Gender' in John Wolfe ed. *Religion in Victorian Britain: Volume V, Culture and Empire* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp.23-58 (p.28).

Indeed, Arthur denies Helen's requests to accompany him on his trips to London as he "did not wish me to be Londonized, and to lose my country freshness and originality by too much intercourse with the ladies of the world" (217). His desire to keep Helen away from the contaminating influence of the city demonstrates a cultural anxiety that women were readily corruptible and thus could threaten the purity of the domestic space as a place of moral restoration. This concept is reflected in John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) where he writes that, "unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offense" into the home, a statement which highlights how women were considered the source of corruptive potential.<sup>55</sup> This is furthered by his statement that, "wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her", which demonstrates how the very concept of home was considered an extension of woman herself.<sup>56</sup> However, Brontë challenges the idea that women are responsible for bringing corruption into the home as despite the fact that Helen never accompanies her husband on his hedonistic jaunts, she reveals, "since he and I are one, I so identify myself with him, that I feel his degradation [...] I am, debased, contaminated by the union" (332). Brontë thus attempts to free Helen from the feminine ideal of spiritual upholder by revealing that both men and women are responsible for cultivating spiritual wellness in the home.

The author also alleviates women from the burden of spiritual management by undermining the myth of the enduringly patient and scrupulously impeccable woman. Indeed, she does not suggest that Arthur is too basely evil for even the most pious Christian woman to reform, but rather reveals that women cannot be responsible for the spiritual salvation of others as they are subject to fault and inclined to sin also. For instance, when Helen realises that she can no longer withstand Arthur's wicked behaviour, she demonstrates what a modern reader might perceive as a justifiable antipathy towards him, "I no longer love my husband—I hate him! The word stares me in the face like a guilty confession, but it is true: I hate him—I hate him!" (310). However, her admission of hatred would have been shocking to a mid-nineteenth century audience who considered the husband to be woman's "earthly Lord" (205), as Arthur himself declares. That Helen later declares, "I am no angel, and my corruption rises against it" (268), justifies her harsh emotional response by humanising her position. Thus by having her protagonist come to terms with the fact "that she, too, may have sinful inclinations", Brontë reveals the fallibility of women which in turn reflects the text's drive towards a realistic depiction of

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<sup>55</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies: Three Lectures* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1879), p.85.

<sup>56</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p.85.

people and events as stated in the preface: "it is better to depict [things] as they really are than as they would wish to appear" (XXVI).<sup>57</sup>

Brontë further undermines the responsibility of women to act as spiritual saviours by promoting the necessity of an individual relationships with God throughout the text. Helen comes to the realisation that, "God might awaken that heart supine and stupefied with self-indulgence, and remove the film of sensual darkness from his eyes, but I could not" (261). This is particularly emphasised towards the end of the novel when Helen returns to Arthur to care for him on his deathbed. Fearing eternal damnation and unable to sincerely repent for his sins, he begs, "Helen, you must save me!" (450), and asks his estranged wife to plead to God for redemption on his behalf. However, that Helen responds by exclaiming, "[N]o man can deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him" (455), furthers Brontë's comment that salvation must come from an individual drive for atonement. This also demonstrates Helen's altered perception of the legitimate limits and expectations of women's role. However, that Helen does appear to believe in the concept of universal salvation, "we translate "everlasting" or "eternal." I don't know the Greek, but I believe it strictly means for ages, and might signify either endless or long-enduring" (178), makes her relinquishment of the role of spiritual saviour appear less of an outright abandonment of her 'wifely duties'. Indeed, that she returns to care for Arthur on his sickbed, "I did my best to sooth and comfort him" (454), reveals her conformity to another set of expectations on her gendered position altogether.

Once Helen relinquishes the role of spiritual saviour, for the remainder of the narrative she can be seen to reflect the kind of behaviour exemplified in nineteenth century domestic conduct books, a literature aimed at women which laid out domestic ideology and the expectations of their duties as wives, mothers, and homemakers. On the topic of angelic womanhood, Siv Jansson notes that in nineteenth century society it was expected that, "[T]he angel must be religious, but not too religious; which parallels the notion that she can have influence, but not power".<sup>58</sup> As at the time Brontë was writing, "the possibility that serious Christianity might give women too much power through moral influence was a continuing point of tension", Helen's move from religious saviour to moral influencer can be considered another example of the sort of mediation of character that occurs throughout the novel to make Helen less subversive and more conforming.<sup>59</sup> In *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class*, Davidoff and Hall note that unlike writers on gender and

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<sup>57</sup> Christine Colón, 'Enacting the Art of Moral Influence: Religion and Social Reform in the Works of Anne Brontë', *Women's Writing*, 11:3 (2004), pp.399-420 (p.407).

<sup>58</sup> Siv Jansson, 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: Rejecting the Angel's Influence', in Andrew Bradstock & Anne Hogan ed. *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture* (Hampshire & London: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp.31-47 (p.38).

<sup>59</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p.117.

conduct of the previous centuries who would often deliver their messages through religious instruction, writing on domesticity in the nineteenth century was more “a practice of class rather than of a particular religious group”.<sup>60</sup> One of the most famous writers of the age, Sarah Stickney Ellis, who is also credited for writing the first temperance fiction which is said to have influenced Brontë’s *Tenant*, adopted the tone of “a respectable moralist with a ‘Christian tinge’” that came “to dominate mid-century England, enveloping the language of the proper relations between the sexes”.<sup>61</sup> Certainly, Helen can be seen to “remain within a generally Christian framework” whilst “her primary concern [is] with morals”, a behaviour directly reflective of conduct literature like Ellis’.<sup>62</sup>

This move away from religious salvation to the adoption of a more broadly moral stance is marked by the birth of Helen’s son where she declares, “God has sent me a soul to educate for heaven” (240), a statement that combines Christian sentiment with her new sense of educational duty. Through the birth of her son, Helen is able to convey key characteristics of domestic femininity such as self-sacrifice. As we saw earlier, the ideal of the thoroughly selfless woman who put the needs of husband and children, as well as philanthropic duty, before her own has been credited to Sarah Stickney Ellis who stated that a woman’s duty was to ‘lay aside [...] her very self [...] to spend her mental and moral capabilities in devising means for promoting the happiness of others’. Thus when it came to Helen’s representation as a working woman, financial necessity replaced personal motives to ensure she appeared properly feminine in the face of desire.

Brontë utilises this same mediation of character when it comes to dealing with the difficult process of Helen leaving her husband. Anne Humphreys has argued that the process of Helen’s separation from her husband without “losing the reader’s sympathy [...] provides the total narrative drive of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*”.<sup>63</sup> Whilst I do not think this can be considered the novel’s sole drive, Humphreys rightly acknowledges how the self-consciousness of the author is reflected in her continuous tentative and mediating representation of her protagonist’s subversive potential. For instance, Helen deflects her own desire to leave her husband onto her son, declaring that, “I am a slave, a prisoner – but that is nothing; if it were myself alone, I would not complain, but I am forbidden to rescue my son from ruin”, and continually focusing on the need to save her son from his father’s influence: “my child must not be abandoned to this corruption” (355). Brontë therefore suggests that if it was not for young Arthur, her protagonist would have patiently endured her situation, and hence

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<sup>60</sup> Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p.184.

<sup>61</sup> For Ellis, Brontë and temperance literature see Marianne Thormählen, “Horror and disgust’: Reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*”, *Brontë Studies*, 44:1 (2019), pp.5-19., Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp.184-185.

<sup>62</sup> Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p.184.

<sup>63</sup> Anne Humphreys, ‘Breaking Apart: The Early Victorian Divorce Novel’ in Nicole Diane Thompson ed. *Women Writers and the Woman Question* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.42-59 (p.44).

the seemingly rebellious act of Helen's matrimonial separation is reconciled through the fulfilling of a separate feminine ideal, that of the dutiful and self-sacrificing mother.

We have seen at various stages throughout this discussion how female representation is often mediated to conform to patriarchal standards of femininity in a way that can be seen to reflect the author's self-consciousness over the reception of the novel's heretical social and moral subjects. However, it cannot be overlooked that Brontë appears to locate power in Helen's conforming positions also. For instance, we saw how her retreat from self-expressive art led to her commercial career and how her silence in the face of gossip led to the redemption of her character through Gilbert. Finally, then, we can see how Helen's ultimate power can be witnessed in the influence of her diary and letters. In her influential study, *Women, Power and Subversion*, Judith Lowder Newton explored the latent potential of women's domestic influence in the nineteenth century which she suggests went unnoticed in criticism until the 1970s when the victim status of women's historical position was first challenged. Newton appeals for an alternative understanding of power for women, arguing that unlike "power as control, a particularly masculine form of power", the "power of ability", also referred to as women's "capability" or "influence", presented "a resource more available to women".<sup>64</sup> She demonstrates how conduct literature was integral to encouraging this idea. For example, Ellis advocated that, "women, in their position in life, must be content to be inferior to men; but as their inferiority consists chiefly in their want of power, this deficiency is abundantly made up to them by their capability of exercising influence".<sup>65</sup> As this statement reveals, Ellis and other like her saw that women could make up for an apparent 'deficiency' in social power by harbouring an authority through their feminine 'influence' in the home.

More than this, Ellis argues that through what she calls "moral power", women could become "the actual ruler in [their] own domestic sphere" as by "let[ting] men rule, as they unquestionably have a right to do, in the senate, the camp, and the court", women, "whose sentiments and feelings give tone to society", would impact the public sphere through their moral and educational influence on men in the private sphere.<sup>66</sup> Rachel Carnell has argued that Brontë explores the covert power of the female position in *Tenant* by drawing upon the notion raised by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that women retained power in the public sphere through the "nurturing humanism" or "humanizing influence" they achieved in the private sphere.<sup>67</sup> She notes that

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<sup>64</sup> Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860* (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 1981), p.XV,6,3.

<sup>65</sup> Ellis, *The select works of Mrs. Ellis*, p.14.

<sup>66</sup> Ellis, *The select works of Mrs. Ellis*, p.31,159.

<sup>67</sup> Rachel K. Carnell, 'Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 53:1 (1998), pp.1-24 (p.10,15).

Helen is presented as “one of the rare enlightened women who could claim a voice in public debate”, as demonstrated through “her impassioned and articulate speeches against drinking, against boarding-school education, and against the irrational differences in the education of girls and boys”, but that Brontë, “ultimately channels Helen's rational and aesthetic talents back to the household [...] where they will be used to humanize husband and son for the good of the public sphere”.<sup>68</sup> Carnell does acknowledge the dissatisfaction of this retreat from direct influence, particularly as Brontë seems to initially position Helen as capable of direct participation in the public sphere, being both an “exceptionally literate” woman and a painter, a potential contributor to cultural meaning.<sup>69</sup> Yet if we follow Newton’s understanding of the gendered differences in displays of power, then we can see how Brontë may have viewed Helen’s position as moral and educational domestic influencer as legitimately desirable and empowering.

We can recognise this by considering the effects of Helen’s diary. For instance, it has been widely noted that Helen’s greatest influence on the text comes from her diary as critics such as Arlene Jackson, Elizabeth Langland, and Jill Matus have agreed on the transformative power of its contents in modifying Gilbert’s “self-centred and petulant” ways.<sup>70</sup> Jill Matus states that, “[W]hen Arthur is the means through which Anne explores the failure to improve or reform”, specifically, as I have shown, in a religious or spiritual sense, character like Gilbert, Hattersley, and Lowborough “provide more sanguine possibilities” as they are “affected by Helen’s narrative in a way that suggests a capacity for growth and maturity, if not perfectibility”.<sup>71</sup> The way the diary achieves this is by adopting a position reflective of that of the middle-class women within domestic ideology. For instance, like Helen, the diary is marginalised in the wider text and must exert its influence from a liminal position within the overarching patriarchal frame. Furthermore, its influence is also necessarily covert. Indeed, it is never explicitly stated that Helen’s diary will have an educational effect, but Brontë’s repeated appointment of the written word as a legitimate and reliable method of representation contrasted with the visual and oral leads to an evident recognition of its reformative role. This is furthered by the fact that, as Nancy Armstrong states, “[T]he idea that literacy offered the most efficient means for

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<sup>68</sup> Carnell, ‘Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, p.11,10,13.

<sup>69</sup> Carnell, ‘Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, p.11.

<sup>70</sup> See Jackson, ‘The Question of Credibility in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, p.201., Langland, ‘The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, pp.111-123., Jill Matus, ‘Strong family likeness’: *Jane Eyre and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, in Heather Glen ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.99-121.

<sup>71</sup> Matus, ‘Strong family likeness’: *Jane Eyre and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p.106.

shaping individuals was the *raison d'être* of conduct books", and thus the very form of the diary and its use in education reflects the teachings of domestic femininity Helen herself advocates.<sup>72</sup>

Before the diary is introduced, however, Brontë continues to emphasise Helen's authority over literature and literacy by first metaphorically teaching Gilbert how to read. As we saw previously, the idle Arthur refused to engage seriously with literature, and even in one scene physically attacks Helen with one of her books, leaving her hand "rather severely grazed" (213). But between Gilbert and Helen, Brontë uses books to promote the development of a commensurate romantic bond. For instance, the reader sees early on how their relationship is founded on the exchanging of books and ideas as they talk about "painting, poetry, and music, theology, geology, and philosophy" and Gilbert reveals how, "once or twice I lent her a book, and once she lent me one in return" (70). Gilbert is therefore already a more suitable match for Helen than Arthur as he is aware of and open to the socially restorative function of literature. However, in one scene he oversteps the social contract of their relationship by offering Helen a copy of Sir Walter Scott's 'Marmion' as a gift, a move that threatens to offset the established equality between them. As we saw with Arthur, there is a symbolic fallout from the book as a potential weapon as Brontë suggests that "books in the hands of men risk being employed in less than humanistic ways".<sup>73</sup> In this scene Helen's rejection is based on her fear that accepting the gift would put her in Gilbert's debt: "[Y]ou think that if you were to accept that trifle from me now, I should presume upon it hereafter" (72). As we have seen, women's involvement in 'exchange' can easily lead to improper implications. Thus Helen's response in denying Gilbert and insisting that "unless I pay for the book, I cannot take it" (71) protects her reputation by distancing her from implications with sexual impropriety.

However, that Helen eventually accepts the book shows a further example of the necessary mediation of her character that Brontë was aware of as she acknowledges the importance of Helen's acceptance of the gift for forwarding the romance plot. By challenging Gilbert's actions, the romantic pace is, however, properly regulated and established by Helen. The point Brontë appears to make here is that Helen's role as an 'exceptionally literate' woman is to regulate the unspoken coded or symbolic world of her relationship, represented here through the use of a literary metaphor which Gilbert, and indeed the reader, could potentially misinterpret or 'misread'. That Helen is in control is furthered by Gilbert's exclamation that,

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<sup>72</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.108.

<sup>73</sup> Carnell, 'Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', p.16.

the moment I touched upon the sentimental or the complimentary, or made the slightest approach to tenderness in word or look, I was not only punished by an immediate change in her manner at the time, but doomed to find her more cold and distant, if not entirely inaccessible, when next I sought her company [...] which I soon learnt carefully to avoid awakening (69).

Brontë makes clear that when Gilbert over-steps the established rules of their relationship, Helen's coldness and distance prompts his self-regulation. That he becomes 'careful' around her demonstrates the covert control she exerts, strikingly different to the failed attempts she made to alter Arthur's behaviour through more forthright and discernible means.

Just before the diary is handed to Gilbert, Brontë reinforces the authority of the written word within the novel's hierarchy of authentic representation. Gilbert expresses his concern that he had been, "shutting my eyes and stopping my ears against everything that threatened to shake my confidence in you" (123), which prompts Helen to reveal her innocence by handing over her diary. However, the novel has already taught us that the visual and oral are not to be trusted and thus the forthcoming narrative acts as a legitimising account to disprove the fallibility of information derived through 'eyes' and 'ears'. One of the key lesson the diary observes, as Elizabeth Langland notes, is that "[B]oth must learn to recognise what is desirable in a partner", Helen through her lived experience as translated in its contents, and Gilbert through his retrospective reading.<sup>74</sup> "In the process", Langland continues, "both are educated into the value of possessing reason, discernment, judgement, control, and restraint both for themselves and for their partner".<sup>75</sup> The lessons of the diary thus reflect the teachings advocated in conduct literature in which 'control' and 'restraint' were particularly emphasised as part of the incorporation of women's moral and economic duties in the home.

Furthermore, it is through the stories of Lady Lowborough and Milicent Hattersley described in the diary that Arthur comes to recognise the appropriate values in a partner. These stories reflect the parable-like tales that writers such as Sarah Stickney Ellis used to morally educate her readers. Indeed, Ellis was brought to notoriety for fictional tales which focused on the devastation caused by alcoholism in middle-class families.<sup>76</sup> Gilbert initially considers Helen's puritanical nature "too hard, and sharp, too bitter for my taste" (40), and prefers the company of Eliza Millward whose "voice was gentle and childish" and whose "manners more frequently resembled those of a pretty playful kitten" (15). But much like the later published *Villette* in which Charlotte Brontë uses the looseness of Ginevra

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Langland, *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (Hampshire & London: Macmillan, 1989), p.129.

<sup>75</sup> Langland, *Anne Brontë: The Other One*, p.129.

<sup>76</sup> See Sarah Stickney Ellis, *Family Secrets, or, Hints to those who would Make Home Happy* (3 vols.) (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842).



Fanshawe and meekness of Paulina Home as two polar extremes of femininity through which the virtues of Lucy Snowe's rationality and mediation is made apparent, Anne Brontë uses the comparable recklessness and malleability of Lady Lowborough and Milicent Hattersley to demonstrate the virtue in Helen's physical, and indeed textual, guardedness and distance.

In keeping with the codedness of anxieties of sexual depravity in the text, Brontë is rarely direct in her representation of the sexually promiscuous Lady Lowborough. However, she makes her role clear through literary metaphors that are employed to reinforce the moral superiority of Helen's position. For instance, in one scene Arthur uses Lady Lowborough's letters in an attempt to inspire jealousy in his wife. Throwing them "across the table [...] with the admonition, 'There! read that, and take a lesson by it!'", her letters are, "full of extravagant protestations of affection" (325) which reveal her emotional and romantic transparency and forwardness. Although this is deemed desirable by Arthur, it is a characteristic Brontë associates with moral looseness. Indeed, this is suggested by her handwriting which Helen identifies as "free" and "dashing" (325), implying a recklessness of character and sexual promiscuity. Later, Helen responds to Lady Lowborough's false friendliness and inability to "restrain her tongue" (311) by handing her a note scribbled on the "fly leaf" (312) of a book that reveals her awareness of her affair with Helen's husband. Unlike her rival who lacks the desired 'restraint' of a properly feminine woman, Helen attempts a covert communication reflective of her reserved and controlled character. This is furthered when she quells Lady Lowborough's concern that she might "publish the matter" by declaring, "I have no wish to publish your shame" (313). Not only does this signal her refusal to gossip, but the term 'publish' acts as a reminder of Helen's authoritative role as diary author.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong argues that the middle-class domestic woman can be considered an antithesis to the anxieties generated by the aristocratic woman. She focuses on anxieties of visibility and the body in particular, revealing how,

conduct books always use women who pursue amusement as examples to demonstrate why women lacking the conduct-book virtues do not make desirable wives. Such women as 'regularly seen in the ballroom or at the card-table, at the opera or in the theatre, among the numberless devotees of dissipation and fashion'. That, in a word, is their crime: these women either want to be on display or simply allow themselves to be 'seen'.<sup>77</sup>

Lady Lowborough, like *Villette's* Ginevra Fanshawe and *Jane Eyre's* Blanche Ingram, represents a certain type of upper-class woman who by making herself too public and putting herself 'on display'

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<sup>77</sup> Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p.85.

becomes associated with moral looseness. What was desirable of a woman at this time was “not a woman who attracts the gaze as she did in an earlier culture, but one who fulfils her role by disappearing into the woodwork to watch over the household”.<sup>78</sup> We can see how Brontë uses writing as a coded means of contrasting the ‘free’ and ‘dashing’ Lady Lowborough with Helen’s closed off, feminine reserve. More so, these literary metaphors also reflect Helen’s textual position, as she can also be considered one who ‘disappears into the woodwork’ of the narrative to exert her authority from the textual margins through a physical non-presence.

Although this concept may appear reductive to a modern reader, the idea that power was stripped “from the body” in order to “[locate] power in the mental features of the domestic women” was thought to discourage the objectification of women and bring awareness to the significance of their roles.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Brontë does not advocate for a total passive invisibility or compliance, but a reduced physical presence, and this is why she employs Milicent Hattersley’s character to demonstrate Helen’s desirable middle-ground. Contradictory to Lady Lowborough, Milicent Hattersley’s passivity and constant attempts to please her husband at the expense of her own autonomy serve to highlight the constructiveness of Helen’s firmness and resilience regarding her own husband’s untoward behaviour. Indeed, it is suggested that Milicent permits her husband’s callous treatment as he complains of her being “too soft—she almost melts in one’s hands” and blames her weakness for encouraging him to “ill-use her [...] for she never complains” (289). Although Lady Lowborough and Milicent are dissimilar in character, one audacious and brazen and the other passive and deplorable, they share a common fault in that they lack self-restraint and, through their willingness to pander to male desire, they abdicate the model feminine conduct that Helen is able to achieve through her self-regulation.

Furthermore, when Milicent writes to Helen complaining of the struggles she faces in married life and then subsequently “begs” her to “burn that letter wherein she spoke so unadvisedly” (228) against her husband, Helen ignores her request due to her understanding of the reformative potential of the written word. Indeed, when Helen reveals the letters to Mr Hattersley they influence him to alter his behaviour as he exclaims, “I’ve been a cursed rascal, God knows [...] but you see if I don’t make amends for it – God damn me if I don’t!” (385). In return, Milicent is “overflowing with gratitude” for Helen’s assistance, exclaiming how she herself “couldn’t have influenced him, I’m sure [...] I should only have bothered him by my clumsy efforts at persuasion” (386). Certainly, we know from Helen’s relationship with Arthur that direct ‘efforts at persuasion’ would be unsuccessful, yet this

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<sup>78</sup> Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p.88.

<sup>79</sup> Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p.88.

transformation demonstrates that the written word carries an authority that is more covertly effective. Helen's diary thus provides examples of two extremes of femininity which position her as a virtuous example of proper domestic femininity by comparison. This leads Gilbert, who originally reads Helen as "proud", "chilly" and "repellent" (22), to declare, "her character shone bright, and clear, and stainless" (403), a statement which reveals the success of the diary in re-educating him also.

The diary has long been the central focus of critics who have looked at the influential and educational potential of Helen's command over the written word. However, towards the end of the narrative Helen continues her influence through a sequence of letters, although their power in reforming Gilbert is often overlooked. Indeed, the parable-like tales of the diary may provide Gilbert with lessons which influence his moral choices and educate him on the virtues of the sexes. However, these come from Helen's first-hand experiences, whereas through her letters she provides him with direct experience of his own to learn from. As Elizabeth Langland identifies, 'the value[s] of possessing reason, discernment, judgement, control, and restraint' are of central concern to the educational role of the text, and Helen's letters help ensure Gilbert "become[s] what the novel applauds: a man without arrogance and a man full of restraint", an antidote to Arthur.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, we have considered the 'reforming' role of the diary as reflective of the role of the morally reforming domestic woman, but Helen's letters can be seen to provide the most explicit examples of narrative 'reshaping', an extension of the reformatory role. Indeed, the notion of 'shaping' or 'reshaping' is reflected in domestic ideology as John Ruskin states that while "man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender", "the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, — and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision".<sup>81</sup> Although this refers to women's domestic management, we can see how through her letters Helen manages to 'reshape' the narrative on a textual level also.

Through her letters, Helen teaches Gilbert the necessary lessons in restraint that Arthur was unable to receive by depriving him of that which threatens to make him act most immorally, Helen herself. When she flees Wildfell Hall to return to her marital home and nurse her sick husband towards the end of the novel, Helen tells Gilbert that their communications must cease, but that "[W]e can hear of each other through my brother" (407). Once again, Helen's brother represents a legitimising figure of patriarchal authority, a socially approved mediator between Helen and the potential for the consummation of inappropriate desire. However, Helen implies that Gilbert will be rewarded for his abstinence should "the truth and constancy of your soul's love for mine" (409) prove patient and

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<sup>80</sup> Langland, *Anne Brontë: The Other One*, p.137.

<sup>81</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p.89.

enduring. Indeed, that Helen asks Gilbert to, “[T]rust my words rather than your own feelings now, and in a few years you will see that I was right” (408), implies that should he follow the lessons in restraint her letters encourage, there is potential for their romantic union yet. However, that Gilbert still has lessons in restraint to master first is made clear through his erratic and impassioned behaviour in Helen’s absence. For example, he pursues her letters to Frederick with fervent interest, describing how he “snatched” (430) them from his possession and then later,

devoured those precious letters with my eyes, and never let them go till their contents were stamped upon my mind; and when I got home, the most important passages were entered in my diary among the remarkable events of the day (447).

Much like Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, Helen’s unattainability, depicted through her physical and textual distance, encourages a frantic attempt at retrieval from her male infatuate. Indeed, words such as ‘devoured’ hint at a similar obsession for attainment expressed by Heathcliff whilst the reproducing of Helen’s letters in Gilbert’s own diary demonstrates his need to possess her through a textual closeness of his own.

This textual closeness culminates as Brontë further emulates her sister by implementing a collapsing of what Elizabeth Langland termed ‘narrative focalisation’ to illustrate Helen’s power.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, until this point the novel’s complex narrative structuring and voicing is acutely ordered, but during the course of the letter sequence it becomes disrupted as it is increasingly difficult to tell whether Gilbert is quoting from Helen’s letters, summarising them, or including them entirely. This is most evident in chapter 49 where Gilbert appears to begin by summarising a letter, only to slip into a direct recounting of a conversation between Helen and Arthur in which the “I” clearly belongs to Helen and not Gilbert: “‘Hear me now, then, Arthur,’ said I, gently pressing his hand” (452). This “narrative transgression - a confusion of outside and inside”, as Langland termed it, disrupts the boundary between outer and inner texts and in doing so, gives the effect of Helen’s voice overtaking Gilbert’s.<sup>83</sup> This is the most literal example we see of the ‘re-formative’ role of the domestic woman as Helen, from her seemingly marginalised position in the text, displaces the assumed authority of Gilbert’s narrative control.

This scene is followed by another of particular symbolic significance to the confirmation of Helen’s authority. In a letter written to Frederick accounting for Arthur’s death, Helen reveals how her husband, “keeps me night and day beside him. He is holding my left hand now, while I write; he has

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<sup>82</sup> Langland, ‘The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, p.117.

<sup>83</sup> Langland, ‘The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, p.117.

held it thus for hours sometimes" (453). Stewart Garrett has argued that in this scene Helen is "almost a direct material conduit" between the "eventual corpse" and "handwritten and read text", "with life drained from the punished villain onto the page or renegotiated desire".<sup>84</sup> Here we receive an apt metaphor for Helen's role as she wields the medium through which she has her greatest influence, the written word, to transform Arthur's wasted life into Gilbert's potential. This notion of Helen as a 'conduit' between men reflects the humanising position of women noted by Carnell. Thus although the image of Helen as a conduit could potentially be interpreted as objectifying, perhaps depicting her as a vessel between men, Brontë clearly presents this as an image of empowerment as Helen's ability to inspire real change is correlated with a life-giving force.

Toward the end of the novel, the authority and power of Helen's position is confirmed by the fact that rather than battling to regain textual control, Gilbert is depicted as having fallen unknowingly under her 'spell'. For instance, when he returns her diary having been convinced of her purity of character, he describes how, "her clear, dark eyes were fixed on mine with a gaze so intensely earnest that they bound me like a spell" (404). The spell-bound Gilbert aptly reflects the success of Helen's undetected, underhand influence which justifies earlier suggestions made by Brontë in the external narrative that the mature, experienced Helen possesses an efficacious vision. As Gilbert states of one of Helen's later paintings, "[T]he picture was strikingly beautiful; it was the very scene itself, transferred as if by magic to the canvas" (71). Here the use of the phrase, 'as if by magic', further associates Helen's capabilities with an undetectable yet clearly powerful force. A further comparison to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* can be made here. Like Helen, the second-generation Catherine adopts an educating role towards Hareton Earnshaw as she teaches him to read and write, elevating him socially and morally and thus reflecting the 'humanising' role of women in the private sphere. Her authority over literacy is also associated with an unexplained and mysterious power as the illiterate Joseph refers to her as a "witch" and in return she mocks him by "taking a long, dark book from a shelf", declaring she will, "show you how far I've progressed in the Black Art" (18). In Emily's novel, education raises two outwardly disparate youths to a level of shared understanding that the author deems necessary for a successful and equal partnership. Helen's educating of Gilbert has a similar effect in that it elevates them to a mutual level of understanding, but Brontë makes clear that her protagonist retains 'control over representation' and 'controls the system of interpretation', as Wettlaufer acknowledged.

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<sup>84</sup> Stewart Garrett, *Novel Violence: A Narratology of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p.112.

This is certified in the novel's highly symbolic ending. When Helen returns to Wildfell Hall after the death of her husband she presents Gilbert with a rose. In a novel that consistently considers and comments upon issues of representation, as this chapter has explored, the employment of the rose as a symbol of Helen's love is overtly clear, and perhaps even as trite as her painting of the turtle-doves at the beginning of the novel. Yet that Gilbert does not comprehend its evident meaning until Helen states, "[T]he rose I gave you was an emblem of my heart" (493), turns the rose into a symbol for representation itself and, most significantly, Helen's control over it. Gilbert's deep absorption in pondering the 'meaning' of the symbolic and his exhibition of 'restraint' reveals the success of Helen's educating influence as he has become, as Langland identifies as 'what the novel applauds', 'a man full of restraint'. Yet ultimately, this scene confirms that it is Helen who is in control of textual meaning. As Langland continues, Helen "has focalized the meaning of this event. Her wishes dominate; he is subject to her desire, and he is the object of her desire".<sup>85</sup> This is confirmed by the retrieval of the rose which Helen initially discards out of the window when Gilbert fails to understand its significance but which he then brings back into the house. This can be considered a symbolic and climactic surrendering of power from the outer narrator to the inner, an indication of Gilbert's emotional and textual submission as supported by the movement of the symbol of the rose from the outside, (frame/social), to the inside, (diary/domestic), through the window 'frame'.

Through this reconsideration of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, I have had two central aims; I have reassessed the dominant role art has taken in criticisms of the novel and, by doing so, revealed the novel's overarching concern with the issue of 'representation' more widely. This has required a reconsideration of Helen's role as an artist, focusing on her status as a commercially driven working woman rather than a creative, bohemian professional artist type. I have demonstrated how art is used alongside gossip to create a criticism of visual and oral representation in the novel. Through this, Brontë explores and critiques women's struggle to control self-representation. However, the way the author responds to these issues, having Helen seemingly close of from self-expression and become a 'properly' emotionally reserved and even silent woman, could be criticised for failing to centralise Helen's voice. However, by being sympathetic to the way Brontë creates a realistic position for Helen within both the text and the society in which she lives, we can see that she bestowed Helen with a position, and a means to accessing that position, that she saw as legitimately empowering. Indeed, *Tenant* is a novel that locates female power in the social, cultural, and textual margins and bestows its protagonist with a specifically female power in the area of covert domestic influence. This is a

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<sup>85</sup> Langland, 'The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', p.45.

power that Brontë aligns with the written word through Helen's command over diary and letters which serve as a type of conduct literature, educating and reforming those it comes into contact with.

Indeed, it is not art but the written word that is the privileged mode of representation in this novel, and this is unsurprising considering how the narrative mirrors Anne's wider intensions for the novel as a whole. As she states in her preface to the second edition, "if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain" (XXIV). The explicit educational intent of Anne's novel is just one of the ways it differs to her sisters' work. Another is the way in which her female protagonist feels frustratingly conforming compared to her more bold and challenging counterparts. But perhaps what this text requires, more than any other, is for the critic to be more aware of the context which Nancy Armstrong and Judith Lowder Newton ask us to consider: that the very position of the middle-class domestic woman, which all the Brontës' novels are concerned with, was one that was not fixed and in place but coming into being at the time they were writing.<sup>86</sup> Not only must we be sympathetic to the authors' attempts at navigating this emerging female subjectivity, but we must expect and accept variations in its depiction also.

This chapter began with a comparison of the depiction of a working woman in art and literature, and as we saw in the introduction, the two forms shared many similar aims in the middle of the nineteenth century. Deborah Cherry has considered the portrayal of domestic femininity in art in a way that can be usefully applied here. Noting that domestic paintings were "key arenas for the definition of bourgeois identity", she acknowledges that,

Women artists engaged with the changing definitions of domesticity in varying and heterogeneous ways, producing pictures which reinforced, negotiated or countered consensual views of bourgeois femininity. From the spaces of femininity they reshaped that social and psychic terrain central to their own identity.<sup>87</sup>

Cherry highlights the variety of ways artists depicted bourgeois femininity, ranging from reinforcing consensual views to countering them. Cherry here reminds us to consider art, and thus literature also, as a space for women creatives to explore the opportunities and limitations they had to carve a space for themselves within or outside the dominant gender ideology of domesticity at the time. She

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<sup>86</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995)., Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860* (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 1981).

<sup>87</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.127,125.

reminds us that this will produce texts of varying degrees of rebelliousness or conformity that are reflective of the authors' 'own identity', of their own necessarily diverse values and perspectives.

It is necessary to accept, then, that Anne's heroine does not access power through subversion in the way her sisters' heroines appear to. Although, as we have seen, Charlotte and Emily's novels are themselves not beyond showing the limits of subversive possibility either. Nevertheless, the protagonist of *Tenant* does appear to harness a different type of power, one that was laid out for women and advocated within domestic ideology through conduct literature. In this sense, the text must be recognised for its upholding of certain patriarchal values. However, this does not mean that Brontë's novel is not rebellious in other ways. Indeed, the way Anne depicts domestic brutality and shows how women are unjustly limited by their social position is done in a way that could be seen as even more bold than her sisters. After all, Charlotte and Emily rely on the Gothic as a veiled means of exploring women's oppression, whereas Anne does not hide behind such techniques. Her commitment to realism was condemned by critics of the time, so much so that in *Sharpe's London Magazine*, a potential reviewer found it so "revolting [...] so coarse and disgusting" that they returned it without comment.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, such reviews are what prompted Anne's defence in her second preface in which she defends that very commitment to realism with her statement: "when I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God, I *will* speak it" (XXIV).

Furthermore, although *Tenant* is at times frustrating in its depiction of a relatively conforming female protagonist, I do not agree with those who have condemned its structure for limiting Helen's presence. George Moore first put forth the argument for Helen's centrality when he wrote that, "[T]he presence of your heroine, her voice, her gestures [...] would preserve the atmosphere of a passionate and original love story".<sup>89</sup> Although I do not agree with Antonio Losano's reading of Helen as a professional artist, she has correctly noted that "what truly distresses Moore", and indeed critics like him who have felt the absence of Helen's physical presence in the text, is that they mourn the ability to revel in the familiar pattern of erotic exchange that keeps woman as the object of male desire: "Gilbert must be able to lay his hands upon Helen for the traditional erotics of a 'passionate and original love story' to be maintained".<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Moore reflects a common assumption and perhaps desire that "women's bodies must not be separated from their narrative productions, but must instead be present, tangible, and visible", and yet as we have seen in *Villette* and *Wuthering Heights* previously, the Brontës as a group were considering new ways of representing women that established

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<sup>88</sup> 'Unsigned review', *Sharpe's London Magazine*, August 1848, in Miriam Allott ed. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (London & New York; Routledge, 2001), pp.263-265 (p.263).

<sup>89</sup> George Moore, *Conversations in Ebury Street* (London: Heinemann, 1924), p.216.

<sup>90</sup> Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature*, pp.21,22.



their subjectivity or located their power without enforcing the supposed necessity of their physical presence.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, Helen's role in covertly influencing education and reform, although a product of traditional domestic femininity, must be considered in the same way as the heroines of Charlotte and Emily's novels: as an example of the successful situation of female power in the very side-lined or marginalised position society enforced upon them to limit their influence.

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<sup>91</sup> Losano, 'The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', pp.22-23.

## CONCLUSION: FROM MARGIN TO CENTRE

This thesis has been the first to address the use of mirrors, windows, and paintings in a comparable study of the work of the Brontë sisters. Although select critics have commented on the symbolism of these images individually and as they function at plot level, none have considered them in sustained detail or recognised their significance as tools for exploring narrative. Through this thesis, I have revealed the central significance of these symbols to the Brontës' literary imagination. As Isobel Armstrong wrote of the window, "[W]indows fundamentally organize some texts", and "some novels would simply not exist without them".<sup>1</sup> Not only do I agree with Armstrong's statement, but this thesis has revealed that the same can be said for mirrors and paintings also. Where I have extended Armstrong's statement is by demonstrating that there is a specific affinity or relationship to be found between women and these symbolic images in these texts. More specifically, I have revealed how these symbols work to explore the roles and representations of women in mid-nineteenth century patriarchal society. I have achieved this by recognising mirrors, windows, and paintings as images that embody essential contradictions concerning the limits of vision and representation as they offer a space for women to explore and define the 'self' through the physical, psychological, and textual, whilst also providing a truthful reminder of the limits of women's abilities for self-definition or revision.

In the first chapter I revealed how mirrors have been associated with women in patriarchal representations throughout history to condemn them to the position of object and to associate them with vanity and a bodily baseness that has denied their autonomy. Influenced by Jenijoy La Belle's ground-breaking study on women's literary responses to the mirror, I have shown how in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë reclaims one woman's relationship with the mirror by subverting its function as a patriarchal tool and using it to achieve individual and narrative autonomy. I moved beyond studies that have considered the mirror in *Jane Eyre* in general terms by providing in-depth analyses of its function as a spatial, psychological, symbolic, and narrative tool. Most originally, I revealed an important yet previously unacknowledged association between Brontë's use of the physical mirror and her use of narrative mimesis. This is key to understanding her unconventional use of genre in the novel as she centralises and subverts the traditionally marginalised and submissive role of the Gothic/fairy tale heroine. Ultimately, I revealed that mirrors are integral to centralising Jane Eyre in both a self-defined

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<sup>1</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University press, 2008), p.129,124.

physical identity and in her role as a narrative storyteller and autobiographer. By comparing this to *Villette*, I highlighted a not yet recognised development between the two novels. I demonstrated how Brontë's later novel reveals a more complicated response to the mirror as she employs it to challenge the idea of women's self-definition as being necessarily established through and tied to their physical identities. As a result, we see that as Brontë developed her thoughts and developed as a writer, she became more sceptical about the role and representation of women in society, but also more experimental in her own narrative response to those concerns. In particular, she challenges a way of storytelling that makes an object of women in the way that George Moore desired when he criticised the absence of the physical presence of Helen Graham in *Tenant*. This is evidenced in the way Brontë creates an elusive and marginalised female protagonist in *Villette* who challenges both traditional representations of women and traditional methods of narrative storytelling.

As this thesis has demonstrated, Anne and Emily also experiment with ways of representing women. In the second chapter, I first revealed how the figure of the female ghost is associated with the window in *Wuthering Heights* to both highlight and challenge women's marginalisation in patriarchal society. Although critics have discussed the window and the ghost figure to various extents individually, none have considered how they are associated to further the tension between female powerlessness and rebellion in the text. By revealing the association between women and windows in this novel, I have uncovered how Emily uses the shared metaphors of Gothic house and female body as spaces of patriarchal regulation and imprisonment to then offer the window and the ghost as comparable states that reflect and critique women's enforced liminal position. I have ultimately revealed *Wuthering Heights* to be a novel where the peripheral and the marginal, when associated with the feminine, become a disruptive force on the cohesiveness and order of dominant patriarchal structures. I compared this to the use of windows in *Shirley* in the second part of this chapter, revealing how Charlotte provides a critique of the very motif of the forlorn Gothic heroine at the window that her sister employs. I demonstrated that she does this by associating the window with women's entrapment within romance narratives and their exclusion from male spheres. I thus moved beyond the common critical consideration of *Shirley* as a novel that shows a tension between 'woman question' and 'condition of England' issues by demonstrating how these are linked to the novel's underexplored, self-reflexive commentary on genre and narrative. By addressing the contrasting ways windows are employed in relation to male and female characters, (presenting sites of protest for the former and sites of imprisonment for the latter), I revealed how Brontë uses them to highlight and critique the different opportunities working class-men and middle-class women had for rebellion and for transcending their limited positions in society at the time. What this comparison reveals, alongside an understanding of the role of genre in *Jane Eyre* in the first chapter, is that Charlotte was a different

kind of writer to her sisters, one who was more self-consciously concerned and troubled with the narrative representation of women's stories and where they fall within existing traditions.

The final chapter looked at Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as a novel that is fundamentally concerned with issues of representation, moving beyond the popular critical response to the novel as being concerned with the contemporaneous emergence of the figure of the professional woman artist. By revealing the privileged place of the written word, I have been able to demonstrate that Anne uses the novel as a space to explore the difficult task she faced as a woman writer representing female experience. However, rather than exploring this through genre, like Charlotte, I revealed that Anne implements contrasting social modes of representation to explore female representation in society. Like her sisters, Anne was concerned with the patriarchal limitations placed on women and through her novel highlights one working woman's struggle to carve out a space of independence and autonomy within the governing systems. However, whereas Emily's novel concludes with a sense of amorality and with a rebellion against status quo assumptions of gender and narrative, and in Charlotte's novels we see a tension between subversion and compliance in their endings, in Anne's *Tenant* we witness a more conventional conformity to traditional views of the Victorian female role. However, as I have revealed, this is a conformity that stems from ideas of a legitimate separate space of female power and influence for women circulating at the time she was writing.

Through this thesis I have demonstrated that how the Brontës dealt with issues of gender, with such distinct approaches and in such varied ways, demands an understanding of their individualism as writers. However, at the same time, the way they tackled issues of female identity and representation through a focus on psychological realism, and through the commandeering and re-imagining of traditional narratives and genres, led to a pioneering transformation of existing narratives in the literary tradition that preceded them that cannot be overlooked for its significance. Although the Gothic mode was one inherited by the Brontës, the way they worked both with and against it by giving emphasis to the psychological experience of women and moving Gothic horrors from their original feudal settings to the home can be credited for establishing what is now referred to as the 'domestic Gothic'.<sup>2</sup> The domestic Gothic aesthetic of the Brontës' work is still visible as a mode of representation utilised by women creatives to highlight the very real struggles and fears that underline female experience, but which maintain an uncannily ahistorical feel through the seemingly unaltered repetition of the nature and source of those anxieties. This no doubt contributes to why the

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<sup>2</sup> See Elaine Hartnell-Mottram, 'Domestic Gothic', in William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith ed., *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp.184-187.

Brontës' fiction continues to find popularity amongst new generations of readers, and why their work continues to influence popular culture both directly and indirectly.

During the four-year process of researching and writing this thesis, I have met many times with the influence, sometimes conscious and sometimes incidental, of the Brontës writing in popular culture. I find this to be compellingly revealing of the legacy and language they created for women to express their experiences under patriarchy. To give a recent example, and one which feels particularly relevant to today's political climate, in the light of the Me Too era and influenced by her experiences as a queer female film director in a male dominated industry, French feminist writer and producer Céline Sciamma released *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019). Set in the eighteenth century, *Portrait* tells the story of a young female painter, Marianne, who is employed to secretly paint a wedding portrait of a reluctant young bride, Héloïse. Worlds collide in this narrative where the two women's oppressions, some shared and some distinct, are nonetheless powerfully linked to one another and, it seems, to wider female struggles and experiences. The film has a strikingly Brontëan aesthetic, despite being set in 1760s France, and the intention of this was revealed in an interview where Sciamma states that she had wanted her film, "to be kind of gothic [...] more Brontë sisters, [with] the grey and the rain".<sup>3</sup> However, a Brontë influence resonates on more than just an aesthetic level in this film, intentional or not.

Indeed, *Portrait* deals with the same issues and anxieties of the female experience explored in the Brontës' novels, issues surrounding women's loss of identity in marriage and their limited opportunities to contribute to culture and society. Héloïse's reluctance to marry stems from her fear of handing over her independence and identity, and this is reflected in the way her portrait makes of her an object for male possession. At the same time, the woman making her 'object' experiences her own erasure. Unlike Héloïse, Marianne is afforded freedom from marriage as a painter, and yet she is forced to publish her art under her father's name to obscure her identity at a time when women were excluded from the professional art world. There is a prevailing sense of haunting in Sciamma's film which underscores its otherwise realist depictions which is also distinctly Brontëan. Sometimes this is explicit, for example, in the multiple shots of Héloïse glowing like a phantom in her white wedding gown. This image of Héloïse appears before Marianne on multiple occasions to remind her of her lover's fate, as she is to endure, like Emily's Catherine Earnshaw, a spectral existence in marriage.

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<sup>3</sup> Emily VanDerWerff & Céline Sciamma, 'Portrait of a Lady on Fire director Céline Sciamma on her ravishing romantic masterpiece', *Vox*, Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 2020. Accessed online at <[www.vox.com/culture/2020/2/19/21137213/portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire-celine-sciamma-interview](http://www.vox.com/culture/2020/2/19/21137213/portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire-celine-sciamma-interview)> 19/02/2020.

Haunting is also a theme less explicitly dealt with. For instance, in one scene Héloïse's mother explains to Marianne the experience of having her own portrait taken for her future husband. Her declaration that the portrait was hung and waiting for her in her husband's home before she arrived acts as a haunting metaphor for how women's fate is dictated by their place in patriarchal traditions. This recalls the spectral interiors of *Villette* as they stand for the oppressive repetition of bourgeois family lineage, and the phantom figure of domestic femininity, Polly Home, who haunts those spaces. Finally, there is a sense that *Portrait* itself works as a sort of haunting reminder of the marginalised position of women in recorded history. In the penultimate scene, Marianne walks unknown in a busy gallery as her painting hangs on the wall under her father's name and is praised by unknowing male critics. Here the audience is reminded of the historical erasure of women's cultural contributions, but when Marianne sees a portrait of Héloïse, they are reminded of more than just the erasure of a female public history. Indeed, Sciamma's film deals with the private, lived experience of women in a way that feels distinctly Brontëan as the domestic, the emotional, and the psychological experience of her female protagonists is ultimately given precedence over the wider socio-political issues raised.

Reading the Brontës backwards through a piece of contemporary women's art such as *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, which was so clearly influenced by their work, I am confirmed in my decision to focus on the symbolism of mirrors, windows, and paintings in this thesis. Sciamma's film, which traps the viewer unapologetically and intentionally within the female gaze, makes frequent use of mirrors to reflect the covert language that is often employed to express female desire. This recalls the use of mirrors in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, and the notion of an indirect or covert access to female power and desire is reminiscent of *Tenant* and *Wuthering Heights*. Of course, at the film's centre there is the image of a painting, or more specifically a portrait, which is used to explore the opportunities and limitations afforded to women when it comes to autonomously creating, living, and representing their gendered experience. The intimacy of the painting and painting scenes, the smallness of the handheld mirrors that move between Héloïse and Marianne, these enclosed images have a monumental effect in the way they voice the unspoken of female experience and desire. As I have revealed, this is what mirrors, windows, and paintings do in the work of the Brontës; they constantly draw attention to and challenge ideas of what is centre and what is periphery, what is subject and what is object, what is inside (self) and outside (Other), and how women occupy, transcend, and at times even collapse these distinctions. One of the most unique and enduring legacies of the Brontës' work, explored in this thesis through the symbolism of mirrors, windows, and paintings, is the way they paved a path for women to create expansive spaces out of an enforced liminal existence, ultimately making their previously marginalised and disregarded positions a new centre.

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