

“I AM MY OWN MISTRESS”:
NARRATING PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY AND LOVE IN CHARLOTTE
BRONTË’S NOVELS

by

HELEN H. DAVIS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The Graduate Center of
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Abstract

“I AM MY OWN MISTRESS”:
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Adviser: Professor Anne Humpherys

The social order of nineteenth-century England was rapidly shifting as power and wealth were increasingly controlled by the professional man. Writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, Charlotte Brontë used her art to attempt to make a place in this emerging power structure for the professional woman. In her novels, Brontë’s heroines struggle to form an autonomous self while developing and maintaining social ties. This struggle manifests itself differently in each novel, but in each the quest for autonomy is intrinsically linked to professionalization, and the women’s autonomy is complicated by relationships with men and women. Professionalization matters because work leads to autonomy only if the woman is in an authoritative professional position, and if her professional authority is not restricted by a husband. In Brontë’s novels, the professional space occupied by women is specifically intellectual: her heroines are teachers and/or writers. My study brings together discussions of professionalization with a feminist narratological analysis of Brontë’s texts. This analysis expands Brontë studies and presents a new application of feminist narratology. It offers a new perspective on Brontë’s feminism by analyzing the ways narration constructs empowered female space in the novels, and also by challenging

previous feminist critiques of Brontë that dismiss her feminism because all of her heroines marry or become engaged. To claim that any domestic ending is a “domestication” ignores the reality that independent women still want to have social relationships. When Brontë’s heroines marry, it is not at the expense of the feminist tendencies of the novels; in fact, the marriages serve to highlight the tension between social acceptance and autonomy. Brontë demonstrates that relationships and autonomy are not exclusive of one another, but are uneasy companions. In the course of her novels, she moves from an idealistic portrayal of marriage to preemptive widowhood, gradually distancing her heroines from relationships, but never eliminating them altogether. Although Brontë moves away from domesticity through the course of her novels, she never abandons the heroines’ urges for relationships. Rather, all four novels can be seen as repeated attempts to negotiate autonomy while maintaining relationships.

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I would also like to thank my husband, who endured more than anyone during the composition of this dissertation. I loved him before we were married, but his unyielding and unselfish support of my career goals has shown me a level of love and commitment that I could only have imagined when we married more than a decade ago. I could not have completed this dissertation without his encouragement and the countless number of small tasks that he voluntarily performed to make my life easier.

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overwhelming task of writing the dissertation back into perspective. I may have written the dissertation faster without her, but it would not have been as meaningful, and I would not have learned as much about the topic, or about myself. I dedicate this work on women seeking empowerment to her.

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Introduction

*I often wish to say something about the "condition of women" question I conceive that when Patience has done its utmost and Industry its best, whether in the case of Women or Operatives, and when both are baffled and Pain and Want <both> triumphant—the Sufferer is free—is entitled—at last to send up to Heaven any piercing cry for relief—if by that cry he can hope to obtain succour.—Charlotte Brontë, in a letter to editor W.S. Williams, (Smith, *Letters II* 66).*

The social order of nineteenth-century England was rapidly shifting as power and wealth were increasingly controlled by the professional man. Writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, Charlotte Brontë used her art to attempt to make a place in this emerging power structure for the professional woman. In her novels, Brontë's heroines struggle to form an autonomous self while developing and maintaining social ties. This struggle manifests itself differently in each novel, but in each the quest for autonomy is intrinsically linked to professionalization, and the women's autonomy is complicated by relationships with men and women. Though romantic relationships most influence the heroines' quests for autonomy because marriage in the nineteenth century placed women in legal and social subordination to their husbands, the heroines' relationships with other women—especially other working women—are also important because they serve as models that the heroines conform to or react against at different times in the development of their autonomy.

Professionalization matters because work leads to autonomy only if the woman is in an authoritative professional position, and if her professional authority is not restricted by a husband. In Brontë's novels, the professional space occupied by women is specifically intellectual: her heroines are teachers and/or writers.

My work brings together discussions of professionalization with a feminist narratological analysis of Brontë's texts. This analysis expands Brontë studies and presents a new application of feminist narratology. It offers a new perspective on Brontë's feminism by analyzing the ways narration constructs empowered female space in the novels, and also by challenging previous feminist critiques of Brontë that dismiss her feminism because all of her heroines marry or become engaged. Many scholars have claimed that the act of marriage undermines the feminist message of a novel because marriage results in domestication that removes all female power. To claim that any domestic ending is a "domestication" ignores the reality that independent women still want to have social relationships. When Brontë's heroines marry, it is not at the expense of the feminist tendencies of the novels; in fact, the marriages serve to highlight the tension between social acceptance and autonomy. Brontë demonstrates that relationships and autonomy are not exclusive of one another, but are uneasy companions. In the course of her novels, she moves from an idealistic portrayal of marriage to preemptive widowhood, gradually distancing her heroines from relationships, but never eliminating them altogether. Although Brontë moves away from domesticity through the course of her novels, she never abandons the heroines' urges for relationships. Rather, all four novels can be seen as repeated attempts to negotiate autonomy while maintaining relationships.

I have chosen feminist narratology as the primary theoretical approach of my dissertation because it couples analysis of narrative form with enquiry into the social causes and ramifications of gender in that form. As Robyn Warhol defines it,

feminist narratology is “the study of narrative structures and strategies in the context of cultural constructions of gender” (“the look, the body” 21). It has its roots in traditional narratology, which provides a framework for analyzing narrative structure and construction. But feminist narratology insists on considering the social and political forces at work outside of and within a text that impact (or create) the formation of gender. Of foremost importance among the early efforts to establish feminist narratology was Susan Lanser’s 1986 article “Toward a Feminist Narratology.”¹ This article was incorporated into Lanser’s book, *Fictions of Authority*, which situates the tension between feminism and narratology and serves as a model of application of Lanser’s concept of feminist narratology. She explains, “With a few exceptions, feminist criticism does not ordinarily consider the technical aspects of narration, and narrative poetics does not ordinarily consider the social properties and political implications of narrative voice” (4). Feminist narratology attempts to bring together technical analysis and social and political implications to create what Ingeborg Hoesterey defined as “the conflation of an orientation toward form with a political agenda—an approach that has destabilized the formalism/antiformism opposition” (10-11). According to Lanser, “The challenge to both feminism and narratology is to recognize the dual nature of narrative, to find categories and terms that are abstract and semiotic enough to be useful, but concrete and mimetic enough to seem relevant for critics whose theories root literature in ‘the real conditions of our

¹ Lanser’s article has been reprinted numerous times, and has been anthologized in both a feminist and a narrative theory anthology: *Feminisms*, ed. Robyn Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, 1997; *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. Michael J. Hoffman, 1996.

lives” (Lanser, “Toward a Feminist Narratology” 344). As Kathy Mezei points out in the introduction to *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, feminist narratology is a “hybrid of an ology (the science of narratives) and an ism (the action of being a feminist)” (2). This juxtaposition is not an easy one for some critics.

Feminist narratology has had its detractors; most famously in the exchange between Nilli Diengott and Susan Lanser in *Style* in 1988. Diengott claimed that Lanser was an example of “feminist critics [attempting to] appropriate to their feminist enterprise others of a totally different nature”; that narrative poetics is clear about what it is doing while feminism is not; and that “narratology’s apparent disregard for ‘the role of gender in the construction of narrative theory’ is not an androcentric oversight but is fundamental to its aims and methodology” (42).

Diengott refused to accept that the role of gender in the construction of theory is even an issue because she believes theoretical poetics is not affected by gender (45).

I, like Lanser and other feminist narratologists, believe that gender does influence and alter both the production and the product of narrative creation, and therefore is a necessary component of narratological study. With the exception of the few formalist narratologists like Diengott who see the type of analysis done by feminist narratologists as “interpretation” which falls outside of the system of theoretical poetics, most narratologists admit the legitimacy of contextualizing narratology; although there are, of course, disagreements about the methods and topics of contextualization themselves. At a time (around 1990) when narratology seemed to

be falling out of favor and its usefulness was being questioned, feminist narratology and other “contextualist”—as Seymour Chatman terms them—approaches to narratology gave narratology new purpose and new life.

Although feminist narratology insists on considering the social context of narratological production, it is still based on more formalistic narrative theory, and uses and qualifies its terminology and techniques. Each of my chapters focuses on different narrative techniques, but some narratological concepts span multiple chapters. Among these are the concepts of the implied author and the implied reader. The implied author of a text is the author created by the text itself, not the actual author of the work. Likewise, the implied reader is the reader created by a text. Wolfgang Iser says that the implied reader

embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader (163).

The concept of implied reader is especially important for my study because many of the techniques I discuss rely on a reader who understands how to read a text in a specific way.

Chapters two and three discuss two very different uses of focalization. The term focalization was coined by Gérard Genette in his book *Figures II* in 1969 and elucidated by him in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* in 1980. Focalization is a

term that is used to differentiate who is seeing and who is speaking. In focalized texts, the narrator is still speaking, but he/she is seeing through the eyes and mind of a specific character. Focalization can be through one character, or there can be multiple focalizers within a single text. Although focalization is most frequently used when discussing third-person narration, it is present in first-person narration and it is useful in analyzing *Jane Eyre* because it allows for the differentiation between the experiences and opinions of the character Jane as she is experiencing her life and the more mature opinions and reflections of Jane the retrospective narrator. Chapter three adopts a more traditional approach to focalization to analyze how the split focalization of *Shirley* creates a space for contrasting the professional conditions of two women: Caroline and Shirley. Other narratological terms are chapter-specific and will be discussed within the individual chapters.

Another term that is central to my analysis is “autonomy”. The meaning of the word autonomy can vary greatly, and for some people the term implies complete and unrestricted independence. Using this definition, no nineteenth-century woman in a relationship could be considered autonomous. But I find that narrow classification too restrictive and unrealistic, because complete autonomy of this type rarely exists in either the real world or in literature. The concept of “relational autonomy” was developed by feminist philosophers who recognize and support the need for discussions of autonomy that allow for relationships. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar state in the introduction to the anthology *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, “if the agent is socially

constituted, as many feminists believe, capacities of the agent like autonomy are also constitutively social and relational” (23). Similar to feminist narratology’s expansion of structuralist narratology, these theorists redefine autonomy by reintroducing its social construction. Relational autonomy asserts that

persons are socially embedded and that agents’ identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Thus the focus of relational approaches is to analyze the implications of the intersubjective and social dimensions of selfhood and identity. (Mackenzie 4)

Since feminist narratologists insist that the cultural and social construction of gender be included in an analysis of the narrative construction of gender, introducing the feminist philosophical concept of relational autonomy is an important addition to a feminist narratological analysis of autonomy.

Just as feminist studies has influenced the study of narratology and autonomy, so too has it influenced the study of professionalization generally, but the study of professionalization in Brontë’s novels specifically has not yet incorporated a full analysis of the female professional. The few studies which deal with professionalization in Brontë’s novels do not analyze professionalization across the body of her novels, and most do not recognize Brontë’s specific creation of a female intellectual professional space. Like most studies of professionalization, Brontë critics have focused either on the male professionals (like Jennifer Ruth’s article,

“Between Labour and Capital,”) or discussed the lack of professional options available to women (like Rosyn Belkin’s article, “Rejects of the Marketplace: Old Maids in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*”). My study examines how Brontë uses intellectual professions to provide a space for autonomy for working women.

Professionalization was a major social issue during the nineteenth century. As the balance of wealth and influence continued to shift into the professional classes, how one was defined professionally became increasingly more important. The issue was particularly difficult for women who were restricted by the belief that working outside of the home was unwomanly and by the belief that they were not as able to be professionals as were men. As David J. Bradshaw and Suzanne Ozment note in *The Voice of Toil: Nineteenth-Century British Writings about Work*,

despite the fact that women constituted one-third of the labor force, prejudice persisted against women’s working outside the home, especially middle- and upper-class “ladies.” While most women of the classes below the aristocracy worked hard within the home, managing the household and raising children, work for pay was generally condemned as making a woman less feminine, distracting her from her more important domestic duties, and demonstrating the failure of her father or husband as a provider. (629)

Managing a household was a woman’s career, and any other career threatened her capacity to successfully complete that most important role. As I will demonstrate in my chapters and conclusion, Brontë is careful in both her personal life and in the

lives of her female characters to carefully see to all domestic duties. It is vitally important that domestic duties not be neglected in this period because to do so would invite the most socially accepted and widespread argument against female professionalization. In fact, in addition to the understandable desire of the female protagonists to want to have romantic relationships, this understanding of the importance of retaining domesticity in mid-nineteenth-century concepts of professionalization demonstrates why the domestic endings of the novels do not remove the feminist impulses of the novel. Instead, the domestic success coupled with professional success can be seen as an attempt at demonstrating that a woman can be a professional while still completing her household duties, an important first step towards the independence sought by the “New Woman” and later movements. Of course, this does not mean that there was no tension between domestic responsibilities and professional ones. In fact, the overt act of needing to balance the two draws attention to the difficulty of female professionalization.

Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong have discussed the importance of separate domestic and professional spheres for men and women.² Especially for occupations such as writing, where even men were working to establish the work as professional, it was important for men to separate their work from that of women. Women’s writing was categorized differently both by other writers and by critics. A work like

² See Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. Poovey states that the process of the use of literature to textually construct an individualistic psychology “was part of the legitimation and depoliticization of capitalist market and class relations, that the definition (and defense) of the English writer’s social role was intimately involved in both, and that stabilizing and mobilizing a particular image of woman, the domestic sphere, and woman’s work were critical to all three” (89).

Jane Eyre, presented to the public under an androgynous name, received very different reviews depending on the assumed sex of the author. Even while male writers like Charles Dickens were working to separate themselves from women writers, isolating themselves as intellectual professionals and the women as non-professionals, Brontë was attempting to present writing and teaching as professions in which women could participate. Further, through her characters' words and through their stories, she makes an impassioned plea that England deal seriously with "the condition of women question."

Although the focus of the discussion of "the condition of women" was a vitally important one for the nineteenth-century women's movement, and received most of the attention of authors, philosophers, and the general public, the discussion was very class-based and "in reality, the debate focused on a small percentage of the female population, ironically on the smallest percentage of those obliged to work for wages" (Bradshaw and Ozment 630). Lower-class women had been working for wages for a much longer period of time, and continued to do so, but as was the case with lower-class men, the process of professionalization was based on separating the middle- and upper-class workers from the crass, uneducated, unprivileged labor of the lower classes. Although this distinction is sometimes muddied in Brontë's novels, it is nevertheless maintained. For example, Frances Henri, the eventual wife of *The Professor's* protagonist and the focus of chapter one of my study, begins her working career as a lacemender and gradually seeks out experience and education to eventually rise to the position of directress. But as in *David Copperfield*, her poverty and lower

station were the result of circumstance rather than heritage. Her father was a minister and her mother's background—other than her being English—is not given, but Frances is presented with middle-class sensibilities and capabilities.

One of the major themes that emerged in the process of this study is that of doubling. Every chapter involves doubling in some way, whether it is a double identity as is the case in the characters Frances, Lucy, and Shirley, or two contrasted states of being as in *Jane Eyre*, or two focalized characters as in *Shirley*. Susan Lanser, Robyn Warhol, Elizabeth Langland, and others have talked about the prevalence of doubling in women's literature generally and in Charlotte Brontë specifically. My study brings to this discussion a new understanding of why these women need a double nature. To Brontë, the struggle between professional autonomy and personal relationships required a division between personal and professional selves. She retained this division in her own life as much as possible.

A chronological analysis of the novels reveals a progression of increasing tension between autonomy and romantic relationships, a progression that was also apparent in Brontë's own professional life. All of the female protagonists in the novels seek some level of social acceptance and desire intimate relationships, and all of the protagonists have a profession, but the balance of relationships and professionalization shifts. Through the course of four novels, Brontë moves from presenting a successful marriage coupled with a successful profession with the full consent of the husband to no marriage at all, and autonomy through professionalization moves from the backstory to the central plot.

Chapter one, “‘I seemed to possess two wives’: The *Professor*’s Implied Narrative,” introduces a new narratological concept, implied narrative, to refer to a narrative that is outside of the text but constructed by the text, and in it I discuss the use of implied narrative to subversively create a woman’s professional space. *The Professor*, which is presented as a working man’s story, makes way for a working woman who continues working after she is married, and suggests starting a school with her husband because she is dissatisfied that he makes more money than she does. The narrative of *The Professor* is first-person retrospective and is narrated by William Crimsworth, the male protagonist. Rather than direct female narration, Brontë inserted female empowerment in what I am calling an implied narrative. Through the implied narrative, the story of Frances Henri is conveyed to the reader. By creating an implied narrative rather than directly narrating, and by presenting Frances’s professional authority through the narration of her husband, Brontë subverts patriarchal authority and creates a woman’s professional space. In some respects, Frances is the most revolutionary of Brontë’s heroines because she rises from working class lacemender to directress, and the most subversive because she does so under the cover of her husband’s authority and narration.

The second chapter, “‘Speak I must’: *Jane Eyre*’s Self Narration,” analyzes the narrative levels created by the retrospective narrator and focalizing character to reveal the process by which Jane forms the strong, empowered voice of an autobiographer. Jane learns quickly that speech can instigate action, and her struggle to find the most effective means of articulation is the driving force of the novel. All the major shifts of

the novel revolve around episodes of Jane's rediscovering her ability to effectively articulate her own identity. Through regaining control of the narrative of her life, she is able to become autonomous. The formation of this relational autonomy can be traced by examining episodes of narration of her life. Jane's desire to have an autonomous self-identity is constantly at war with her desire for companionship, and she loses control of her narration when she subsumes her voice in order to create and/or maintain social relationships. She learns how to have a social relationship without losing narrative (and thus personal) control. Jane demonstrates her autonomy by becoming a writer, and through her autobiography she has narrative control over not only her own life, but also the lives of the people who silenced or discounted her narration. Therefore, Brontë created in Jane a female voice that insists on her own autonomy.

Chapter three, “‘Quite a woman and something more’: The Dual Focalizers of *Shirley*,” analyzes focalization as a narrative tactic to contrast the professional and personal situations of two women. Female professionalization is at the heart of *Shirley*, which juxtaposes two women: Shirley, who has inherited an estate and businesses which she runs as a man, and Caroline, who wishes for a profession “fifty times a day,” but is stuck in middle-class inactivity due to her gender. Both women represent aspects of the struggle between professionalization and relationships, so Brontë chose to create a third-person narrator who focalizes through both women. In *Shirley*, professional power is directly related to gender and relationships. Both Shirley and Caroline marry, but Shirley—who has a great deal of professional power—hesitates to share this

power and resists marriage before ultimately acceding and sharing her professional power with her husband. But she joins Caroline in a project outside the scope of her shared duties: she and Caroline start a day school together.

The last chapter, “‘I seemed to hold two lives’: Disclosing the Unnarratable in *Villette*,” explores narrative secrecy and deception, and expands the newly emerging narrative theory concepts of unnarration and disnarration by introducing the subcategory *circumnarration*. *Villette* (1853) is the retelling of *The Professor* from the woman’s perspective. Brontë once again creates a retrospective first-person female narrator. Unlike Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe does not fully disclose her background and is often secretive, yet Lucy directly addresses the reader 44 times, more than in any of Brontë’s other novels. These addresses often serve to either direct the reader to recall a previous incident or to distract the reader from narrative omission or secrecy. They create an implied reader who accepts the narrative omissions, distractions, and instructions of the narrator. Their existence as an overt part of the text has the opposite effect on a “real” reader. One reason why Lucy may feel the need for secrecy and deception is because she is retrospectively writing a narrative that will end outside of the bounds of the traditional marriage plot. Brontë chooses to have Lucy’s fiancé drown, thereby allowing her to have an intellectually and emotionally fulfilling relationship with a man without the legal and patriarchal ramifications of marriage. Lucy is the most independent, and the most lonely, heroine in Brontë’s novels. She actively seeks her own position, educates herself, and maintains and expands the school M. Emanuel helped to make possible. Emanuel’s death does not remove the

tension between autonomy and love. Rather, the absence of resolution heightens the tension, creating the most poignant ending of all of Brontë's novels. In the last chapter, Lucy tells the reader: "M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox? Listen" (493). During these three years, Lucy has both love and professional autonomy. She runs and expands her own school, and she has a continued relationship with M. Emanuel through letters. Lucy also has another profession. Like Jane, she too is an author, and narrates her own retrospective autobiography, thereby joining the two intellectual professions in one autonomous woman.

"'The business of a woman's life': Concluding Thoughts on Professionalization in Brontë's Novels and in Her Life" compares the resolution (or lack thereof) of the tension between autonomy and relationships in each novel and examines how Brontë dealt with tensions between her own professional career and her relationships with her family, friends, and husband. The conclusion begins by discussing the advice—given to Brontë while she was still a young writer by Robert Southey—that literature ought not to be "the business of a woman's life" and how it impacted her professional life. Brontë and her sisters used androgynous pseudonyms and shrank away from publicity. Although Brontë did not give up writing after her marriage, she did not finish another novel, and even her letters were subject to her husband's censorship. Given the struggle between professional and intellectual autonomy and relationships present in the novels, it seems only fitting to analyze how this struggle manifested itself in Brontë's own life.

CHAPTER ONE

“I seemed to possess two wives”:
The Professor's Implied Narrative

In the Preface to *The Professor*, Charlotte Brontë stated that she set out to create a hero who would “work his way through life as [she had] seen real living men work theirs. . . . As Adam’s son he should share Adam’s doom—Labour throughout life and a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment” (1).³ I propose that Brontë went a step further. By the novel’s close, the “hero” William Crimsworth is not laboring alone. This novel, which is presented as a working man’s story, makes way for a working woman. Frances Henri continues working after she marries Crimsworth, and suggests starting a school to her husband because she is dissatisfied that he makes more money than she does. Though she performs the expected domestic “labour,” running her household and birthing and mothering a child, and although Frances and Crimsworth share the same profession—teaching—Frances negotiates with him to run a school by herself, allowing her to have professional autonomy while being married.⁴

³ The preface quoted here was added in late 1849 or early 1850. *The Professor* was written in 1846, but was rejected for publication nine times during Brontë’s lifetime. On February 5, 1851, Brontë gave up her attempts to publish the novel and the manuscript was “locked up in a cupboard by himself.” After her death, Brontë’s husband, Arthur Nicholls, and her father made alterations to remove “offensive” material. It was first published posthumously in 1857. My references are to the Oxford edition of *The Professor*, which is based on the Clarendon edition of the novel, which used Brontë’s manuscript rather than the posthumous first edition as the source text. The manuscript is housed at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

⁴ As discussed in my Introduction, I am using a concept of relational autonomy, developed by feminist philosophers, which asserts that “persons are socially embedded and that agents’ identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Thus the focus of relational approaches is to analyze the implications of the intersubjective and social dimensions of selfhood and identity” (Mackenzie 4).

Frances's extraordinary narrative of empowerment is not overtly narrated. It is obvious only when the fragments of information about Frances and her life are pieced together, to form what I call an *implied narrative*. The narrative of *The Professor* is first-person retrospective and is narrated by William Crimsworth, the male protagonist. Rather than using direct narration by a woman as she does in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, Brontë inserted an implicit story to subversively create female empowerment and a woman's professional space. My theory of implied narrative posits that there is an alternate means of communication within the text, one that communicates a story that is not part of the narrator's narration, but that can be reconstructed by an ideal reader.

The term implied narrative is not currently in use in narrative theory, but it is informally used in poetic and art studies.⁵ Since there is currently no narratological term for analyzing an implicit story that is not directly narrated, I am adapting the term for use in narrative theory. In these instances, sequences of related events are reconstructed by the ideal reader to produce a narrative that is not a part of the *narrator's* narration. One of the most formative concepts of narrative theory is the distinction between *fabula* and *szujet*.⁶ *Szujet* is the events of a story in the order in which they are presented, whereas *fabula* is the arrangement of the events of the story in chronological order. The *fabula* is constructed by the reader, and is constantly

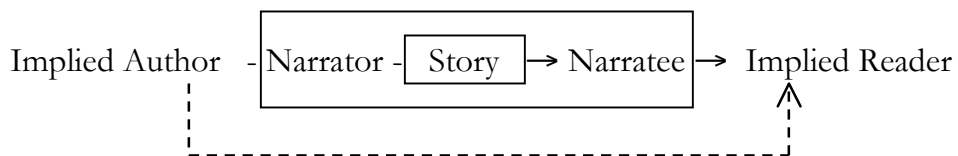
⁵ For example, one could discuss the implied narrative of Pieter Bruegel's painting, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. W.H. Auden and William Carlos Williams reconstruct Bruegel's implied narrative in their poems about the painting. In a presentation at Dickens Universe in July of 2005, Garret Stewart called the act of recreating such untold stories *narratography*. He did not give the untold stories a name (what I call *implied narrative*). Narratographies can go much further than the information present in the implied narrative, as Auden's poem demonstrates.

⁶ Other terms for *fabula/szujet* are story/plot and story/discourse.

revised and rearranged as a reader reads the story and gains more information. It is the same impulse for reconstructing chronological order that induces readers to construct the narrative of characters or events that are not directly narrated.

In *The Professor*, Frances's story is not directly narrated in the szujet, but it is possible to recreate a narrative of empowerment based on the fragments of information presented by the narrator and revealed by Frances in conversations. Just as a reader reconstructs the story in chronological order in the fabula, an ideal reader can also reconstruct Frances's life story. Once constructed, this implied narrative helps to highlight Crimsworth's unreliability as narrator and presents an alternative narrative of female professional empowerment.⁷

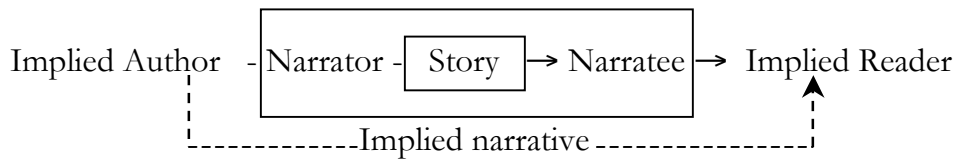
Seymour Chatman presents unreliable narration as functioning as follows:



In this model, the dashed line represents a “secret ironic message about the narrator’s unreliability” (*Coming to Terms* 151). His diagram illustrates how communication between the implied author and reader can take place outside of the narration.

Implied Narrative is one way in which the implied author can transmit information not through the narrator directly, as my version of the diagram shows:

⁷ Implied narratives do not require an unreliable narrator to function, but it is one way that they are manifested. In a future article, I will explain different types of implied narratives. In addition to the use of unreliable narration, implied narratives can also exist in texts like detective fiction where the narrator is purposefully withholding information. In other instances, implied narratives can be reconstructed from fragmented information presented by a narrator who does not want parts of her own or others’ stories to be directly narrated. Implied narrative is always necessarily the result of narrative omission of some kind.



The dashed line still represents a message about the narrator's unreliability, but this diagram represents that this message is conveyed through the implied narrative.

The implied narrative of *The Professor* is that of a cunning woman who succeeds in simultaneously convincing her husband to think himself the dominant member of the household while doing what she wants. By presenting Frances's professional authority beneath the surface narration of her husband rather than direct narration, this implied narrative subverts patriarchal authority. Frances rises from a working-class lace mender to directress of a school, and she does so under the cover of her husband's patriarchal and narrative authority. However, Frances's full narrative of empowerment does not exist unless it is constructed by the implied reader, hence this construction must be labeled and studied. *The Professor's* underlying feminist empowerment is not clear without analyzing its implied narrative. Formally establishing a term for these implicit stories will allow narrative theorists to more easily discuss their use in literature. In *The Professor*, Frances's implied narrative breaks into Crimsworth's narration in the form of dialogue, and becomes evident in Crimsworth's references to Frances's demands and in his acquiescence to her wishes.

The surface narrative relates the occupational experiences of the narrator, William Crimsworth. He is the second son of a father who was "in trade" and a disinherited aristocratic mother. He is educated at Eton, and offered a living as a

clergyman and his choice of marriageable cousins from his aristocratic uncles but refuses “the burden of [their] patronage” (5). The first half of the novel recounts his efforts to find a satisfactory means of supporting himself. He begins at his brother’s mill’s counting house, but feels unappreciated and unchallenged. He eventually moves to Brussels, where his friend Yorke Hunsden helps him get a teaching position as an English instructor at a boys’ pensionnat, or boarding school. He also begins teaching at the girls’ pensionnat next door, where he meets Frances Evans Henri, his future wife.⁸ Frances teaches sewing at the school, and also becomes one of Crimsworth’s English language pupils. She is eventually dismissed by the jealous headmistress, and Crimsworth also leaves his position at both establishments after the heads of the two schools decide to marry. After obtaining a new position, Crimsworth asks Frances to marry him, and she agrees on the condition that she be allowed to continue teaching. After a year and a half of marriage, Frances starts her own boarding school, which she runs while Crimsworth works as a college professor. They have one son, Victor. After sufficient years of work and investing income, the couple and their child retire to England.

Because critics consider foremost Crimsworth’s story and do not recognize Frances’s implied narrative of empowerment, *The Professor* has been often dismissed as

⁸ Frances’s mother was English and her father Swiss, but “she had neither been in England, nor taken lessons in English, nor lived in English families” (124). She grew up speaking more English than French (128). She was born in Geneva, and after her parents died, she lived with her Aunt. At some point the two moved to Brussels. Crimsworth clearly believes that Frances has inherently English sensibilities. Although I do not discuss issues of nationality in this dissertation, the novel is rife with comparisons between English refinement and foreign crassness. Some of these comparisons are undercut, but certain traits do seem to remain “English.”

a novelistic failure, especially by feminist scholars.⁹ By revealing Frances's implied narrative, I hope to shed new light on the novel's strong, subversive feminist message. For example, a misreading of *The Professor* that results from failing to recognize Frances's empowerment is Annette Federico's "The Other Case: Gender and Narration in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*." Federico argues that "*The Professor* deals not with how to obtain power (the problem for Brontë's heroines), but how to outgrow the need for power" (343). I disagree. Frances obtains a great deal of power outside the home, and her implied narrative reveals a woman who shrewdly negotiates her professional position. A few recent scholars, such as Annette Tromly, Fiona Morphet, and Jennifer Ruth have begun to defend the merits of *The Professor*, but even these critics have not recognized and therefore not fully explored Frances's professional empowerment or the feminist implications of her implied story. My feminist narratological approach to the novel's implied narrative allows me to reevaluate this often-dismissed novel. By tracing the implied narrative present in *The Professor*, I show that Brontë explored the same topics in her first novel that have garnered attention and praise in her other novels.

Brontë's use of implied narrative as a narrative strategy in *The Professor* is unique among her work. While Brontë herself recognized the weakness of the narrative structure of the novel's beginning, she defended its merits for the rest of her

⁹ Helen Moglen says that "the story is neither engaging nor convincing" (86). Margot Peters claims it is "little more than the framework of a novel" (79). Elaine Showalter states that it "lacks conflict and is morally one-sided" (228). Robert Bernard Martin says that it is "so full of minor faults" and "even greater flaws" that it would not be read "if it were not the first published novel of a great writer" (39).

life. After the successful publication of *Jane Eyre*, Brontë commented on the form of her first novel to her W.S. Williams, her publisher's reader:

I found the beginning very feeble, the whole narrative deficient in incident and in general attractiveness; yet the middle and latter portion of the work, all that relates to Brussels, the Belgian school & c. is as good as I can write; it contains more pith, more substance, more reality, in my judgment, than much of "Jane Eyre". It gives, I think a new view of a grade, an occupation, and a class of characters—all very common-place, very insignificant in themselves, but not more so than the materials composing that portion of "Jane Eyre" which seems to please most generally—. (Smith, *Letters I* 574)

The middle and latter portions of the novel are precisely the portions of the novel that include Frances's implied narrative.

Susan Lanser, in her book *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, writes:

I have chosen to examine texts that engage questions of authority specifically through their production of narrative voice. In each case, narrative voice is a site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge that is manifested in and sometimes resolved through ideologically charged technical practices. . . . These narrators, skeptical of the authoritative aura of the male pen and often critical of male dominance in general, are nonetheless pressed by social and textual convention to reproduce

the very structure they would reformulate. . . . That is, as they strive to create fictions of *authority*, these narrators expose *fictions* of authority as the Western novel has constructed it—and in exposing the fictions, they may end up re-establishing the authority. (7-8)

Lanser identifies Charlotte Brontë as one of the women who uses narrative voice to create fictions of authority, but she confines her discussion to *Jane Eyre*. I argue that Frances's implied narrative in *The Professor* is an example of a narrative that exposes the *fictions* of authority by exposing the fiction of Crimsworth's authority as a husband and as a narrator.

As an illustration of how a narrative can expose "*fictions of authority*," Lanser presents and analyzes a letter which was published in *Atkinson's Casket* in April 1832:¹⁰

FEMALE INGENUITY.

Secret Correspondence.—A young Lady, newly married, being obliged to show her husband, all the letters she wrote, sent the following to an intimate friend.

. . . . I tell you my dear
 husband is one of the most amiable of men,
 I have been married seven weeks, and
 have never found the least reason to

¹⁰ *Atkinson's Casket, or Gems of Literature, Wit, and Sentiment* was a serial published in Philadelphia from Jan-1826 – Dec-1840; thereafter it merged with Burton's Gentleman's magazine to become Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine. It continued to be produced under various names until December 1858.

repent the day that joined us, my husband is
 in person and manners far from resembling
 ugly, crass, old, disagreeable, and jealous
 monsters, who think by confining to secure;
 a wife, it is his maxim to treat as a
 bosom-friend and confidant, and not as a
 play thing or menial slave, the woman
 chosen to be his companion. Neither party
 he says ought to obey implicitly;-- (qtd. in Lanser, *Fictions of Authority* 9-
 10)

On the surface, this letter presents the narrative of a loyal wife, but a closer analysis reveals a subtext which subverts the husband's patriarchal control and allows the wife to speak. The key to this subtext is to read every other line of the letter:

. . . . I tell you my dear
 I have been married seven weeks, and
 repent the day that joined us, my husband is
 ugly, crass, old, disagreeable, and jealous [;]
 a wife, it is his maxim to treat as a
 play thing or menial slave, the woman
 he says ought to obey implicitly;-- (qtd. in Lanser, *Fictions* 10-11)

The subtext of an intolerable marriage subverts the surface docility and submission to patriarchy, but also exposes the repression and mistreatment suffered as a result of

the patriarchal system (since Victorian women, particularly married women, had few rights, and divorce was virtually impossible). It is, as Lanser labels it, a textual practice that exposed the “*fictions* of authority.” In this example, both the surface text and the subtext are narrated by the same woman. While I examine the use of the narrative levels of the same female narrator to create authority in my chapters on *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, I argue that Brontë devised a different textual practice to achieve a similar end in *The Professor*. In the letter above, the surface text bows to patriarchy by praising the narrator’s husband, while the subtext reveals the husband’s abuse and the wife’s misery. In *The Professor*, the narrator himself is the representative of patriarchal authority. While there is not a *subtext* in the novel, there is another story relayed in an implied narrative, and this story subverts the authority of the patriarchal narrator.

Brontë’s choice to use a male narrator has been condemned by many critics. Christine Alexander notes that “nowhere [in the juvenilia] does Charlotte adopt the voice of a female character,” and that her first novel continues to use the male narrator (but for the last time) (226). Brontë chose in her first novel to continue speaking in the voice of patriarchal authority present in her childhood collaborations with her brother Branwell. In *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*, Helene Moglen states that “We assume that Brontë chose to use a male narrator for reasons similar to those which had dictated the same decision for her in the past: that she is still bound to the ambivalent attitudes of adolescence and accepts automatically the male point of view as the ‘official’ perspective” (88). Since Frances does not directly narrate, Moglen assumes that Brontë naively accedes to male authority. She misses the subversive

undertones that undermine Crimsworth's authority. On the other hand, Federico states that "In *The Professor*, [Brontë] is learning what it is to have the power of authorship, and therefore it is consistent that she should go inside the system to represent the source of that power. . . . To tell a man's story is to insist on access, to insist on [Brontë's] complete individuality as a person and as an artist." (324, 329). I would add that she not only represents the power, but subverts it by also telling a woman's story, which is why *The Professor* conforms to Lanser's concept of a fiction of authority.

Crimsworth, as narrator, carefully controls the implied reader's access to Frances. When she is brought into his class to learn English by Mdlle. [sic] Reuter, the pensionnat's Directress, Crimsworth states that he does not even look directly at her, keeping her physical appearance from entering the narrative. He later gives a description of her, followed by the statement:

Now Reader—though I have spent a page and a half in describing Mdlle. Henri, I know well enough that I have left on your mind's eye no distinct picture of her; I have not painted her complexion, nor her eyes, nor her hair, nor even drawn the outline of her shape. You cannot tell whether the nose was aquiline or retroussé, whether her chin was long or short, her face square or oval, nor could I the first day and it is not my intention to communicate to you at once, a knowledge I myself gained little by little. (112)

Exuberant description of what the narrator is *not* narrating makes the implied reader curious about Frances and her story so that he/she begins to construct it from clues or assumptions, and also makes Crimsworth's attention to her physical body more conspicuous.

Crimsworth's narration of the development of their relationship revolves around his perception of coaxing her into awakening as a scholar and a woman. He says of her:

Frances did not become pale or feeble in consequence of her sedentary employment [her lessons] . . . Her figure . . . became rounder and . . . the exquisite turning of waist, wrist, hand, foot and ankle [sic] satisfied completely my notions of symmetry, and allowed a lightness and freedom of movement which corresponded with my ideas of grace. Thus improved, thus wakened to life, Mdlle. Henri began to take a new footing in the school; . . .

To speak truth, I watched this change much as a gardener watches the growth of a precious plant and I contributed to it too, even as said gardener contributes to the development of his favorite. (136-137)

While Crimsworth clearly claims credit for Frances's transformation in this and other passages, the implied narrative reveals that Frances is a self-motivated, self-made woman. Frances tells him in their dialogue,

Monsieur—I begged my Aunt to have me taught lace-mending soon after we came to Brussels, because I knew it was a *métier*—a trade which was easily learnt and by which I could earn some money very soon . . . I earned money, a little, and this money I have for lessons in the studies I have mentioned . . . soon I shall try to find a place of governess, or school-teacher when I can write and speak English well.

(131)

Frances's plan to advance herself was in place before she ever met Crimsworth, and this undercuts his attempts to take credit for her accomplishments. Frances's *devoirs* (which he quotes in places) and her quick mastery of English also serve to undermine Crimsworth's narrative claims of awakening her through his own skills as teacher because they clearly demonstrate her intelligence, eloquence, and creativity. After quoting a *devoir* that is both eloquent and creative, he says that "It was mostly made up, as the above example shews [sic], of short and somewhat rude sentences, and the style stood in great need of polish and sustained dignity" (123). For example, here is one of the sentences that Crimsworth described as a short, unpolished sentence:

"It is Christmas Eve," says he, "I mark the date; here I sit alone on a rude couch of rushes, sheltered by the thatch of a herdsman's hut; I, whose inheritance was a kingdom, owe my night's harbourage to a poor serf; my throne is usurped, my crown presses the brow of an invader; I have no friends; my troops wander broken in the hills of

Wales; reckless robbers spoil my country; my subjects lie prostrate,
their breasts crushed by the heel of the brutal Dane.” (122-123)

That the *devoir* is so obviously not composed of short, unpolished sentences, coupled with Frances’s first oral recitation, indicates that she has a natural aptitude for writing and speaking well in English. Crimsworth presents her as coming into beauty and intelligence in order to claim credit for her transformation and demonstrate control over her, but instead the implied reader sees his unreliability when discussing Frances. The contrast between his descriptions and reality also add information about Frances’s intelligence and determination to the implied narrative.

Frances quickly realizes that Crimsworth relishes the master/pupil relationship, and uses it to her advantage during their courtship and marriage. Frances always addresses Crimsworth as “Monsieur,” or “Master,” and she asks his permission to do things; but her requests are outside the bounds of what was traditionally acceptable: Frances requests professional autonomy and equity. Their discourse is marked by Frances’s deference to Crimsworth’s patriarchal position, but the content of the discourse is quite progressive. Just as her requests undercut the submission implied by her formal address, the requests themselves often come in the form of dialogue, thereby interrupting Crimsworth’s narrative and allowing Frances to speak for herself.¹¹ In the proposal scene, Brontë uses dialogue to undercut Crimsworth’s culturally expected masculine notions of being the financial head of the

¹¹ Fiona Morphet aptly notes that “we are not restricted to Crimsworth’s perspective (as many critics assert) because the text keeps us constantly alert to his restricted perspective on himself and others. This is particularly important in the dialogue” (352).

family. By contrasting Crimsworth's narrative passages with Frances's dialogue, the implied reader can see that Frances does not accept a traditional matrimonial relationship. Fiona Morphet states that

Brontë undermines Crimsworth's complacent conviction that he is Frances's benefactor and that whatever suits him must be good for her, too, through Frances's skillful argument in negotiating her own proposal not to become his dependent wife. Against his resistance to her explicit wishes, Frances manages to persuade Crimsworth that to "work together" will be more rewarding than the lordly vision he has of himself "feeding and clothing" her "as God does the lilies of the field." (354)

Frances ignores Crimsworth's patriarchal offers to support her, and instead offers her own vision of marriage.

The dialogues allow the narrative to simultaneously demonstrate Crimsworth's lack of understanding of Frances and her adeptness at understanding and manipulating him. She is able to negotiate the terms of her marriage and profession. When Crimsworth proposes to Frances he asks, "Frances, have you enough [regard for me] to give yourself to me as my wife? To accept me as your husband?" (206) He is asking for the traditional surrendering of her self to him, for her acceptance of him as her husband, which by implication includes submission to his authority. Her response is not a simple yes; she wants clarification about his treatment of her and her future professional prospects. She asks him, "Monsieur sera-t-il aussi bon mari

qu'il a été bon maître?"¹²(206). He takes this as a straightforward question, and replies, "I will try, Frances" (206). But she does not mean it to be a straightforward question, as her physical and verbal response indicates:

A pause—then with a new, yet still subdued inflexion of the voice; an inflexion which provoked while it pleased me; accompanied too by a "sourire à la fois fin et timide"¹³ in perfect harmony with the tone:

"C'est à dire, Monsieur sera toujours un peu entêté, exigeant, volontaire--?"¹⁴

"Have I been so, Frances?"

"Mais oui; vous le savez bien."¹⁵ (206-207)

The subdued voice is belied by the "smile at once shrewd and bashful," but although Crimsworth sees and describes this smile, he does not seem to understand the nature or ramifications of the shrewdness masked by bashfulness and submissiveness. She points out to him that he has been stubborn, exacting and strong-willed. The conversation continues:

"Have I been nothing else?"

"Mais oui; vous avez été mon meilleur ami."¹⁶

"And what, Frances, are you to me?"

¹² All translations are my own. "Monsieur, Will you be as good a husband as you were a teacher?"

¹³ "smile at once shrewd and bashful"

¹⁴ "This is to say, Monsieur, you will always be a little more stubborn, more exacting, more strong willed-

¹⁵ "Yes; you know it well."

¹⁶ "Yes; you have been my best friend."

“Votre dévouée élève, qui vous aime de tout son cœur.”¹⁷

“Will my pupil consent to pass her life with me? Speak English now, Frances.” (207)

Crimsworth never says that he will stop being strong-willed and exacting, but after she agrees to marry him, it becomes clear that Frances’s shrewdness is still in play.

After consenting to marry Crimsworth, Frances immediately ensures that she can continue to teach:

“Well—monsieur, I wished merely to say that I should like of course to retain my employment of teaching. You will teach still I suppose, Monsieur?”

“Oh yes! it is all I have to depend on.”

“Bon! I mean Good. Thus we shall have both the same profession—I like that—and my efforts to get on will be as unrestrained as yours—will they not, Monsieur?”

“You are laying plans to be independent of me,” said I.

“Yes, Monsieur, I must be no incumbrance to you—no burden in any way.” (208)

Crimsworth would have been expected to financially support his family, and Frances would have been expected not to work if financially possible. He realizes that she is seeking some level of independence, and Frances does not deny that this is her goal. To remove “incumbrance” as part of the expectation of marriage is a major revision

¹⁷ “Your devoted student, who loves you with all her heart.”

of the meaning of marriage, especially of the role of the husband. Frances is actively translating his conventional view of marriage into a new one, where the expected role of dependent is an incumbrance and financial contribution from the wife is desired and expected.

As the conversation continues, convention is further overturned:

“But, Frances—I have not yet told you what my prospects are—I have left M. Pelet’s—and after nearly a month’s seeking, I have got another place, with a salary of three thousand francs a year, which I can easily double by a little additional exertion; thus you see it would be useless for you to fag yourself by going out to give lessons; on six thousand francs you and I can live and live well.” (208)

Crimsworth makes it clear that he can financially support his wife, and assures her that she need not tire herself by giving lessons, but his perception of her response to his ability to support her demonstrates both his misunderstanding of his fiancée and her determination to earn a living for herself. Moments in this conversation when Crimsworth’s narration interrupts the dialogue illustrate the subversion of his narrative by the implied narrative because his narration—rather than accurately elucidating the events—demonstrates both his misunderstanding of the situation and his inability to narrate Frances’s story. His narration is revealed as unreliable because the dialogue clearly shows that his perception of Frances’s thoughts in no way reflect her actual thoughts. The scene continues:

Frances seemed to consider: there is something flattering to man's strength, something consonant to his honourable pride in the idea of becoming the Providence of what he loves—feeding and clothing it, as God does the lilies of the field; so to decide her resolution, I went on:

“Life has been painful and laborious enough to you so far, Frances; you require complete rest; your twelve hundred francs would not form a very important addition to our income, and what sacrifice of comfort to earn it! Relinquish your labours; you must be weary, and let me have the happiness of giving you rest.” (208)

Crimsworth cannot understand Frances's thoughts because his own are full of his ability and expectation to financially support her, which conforms to cultural expectations about his role as financial provider. His misreading of her hesitation leads him to offer patriarchal shelter from toil and is evidence of his lack of understanding of her. For her, work is not about wealth or providing for a family. It is about maintaining an equal footing with her husband and retaining professional autonomy. Crimsworth also reveals his concern that her working might cause some “sacrifice of comfort” for the household. Frances is aware of this concern and is very careful during her marriage to see to his domestic comfort. Crimsworth's lack of understanding is again emphasized in his narrative speculation about Frances's comments:

I am not sure whether Frances had accorded due attention to my harangue; instead of answering me with her usual respectful promptitude, she only sighed and said:

“How rich you are, Monsieur!” and then she stirred uneasily in my arms. “Three thousand francs!” she murmured, “while I get only twelve hundred!” She went on faster, “However it must be so for the present; and, Monsieur, were you not saying something about my giving up my place? Oh no! I shall hold it fast!” and her little fingers emphatically tightened on mine. “Think of my marrying you to be kept by you, Monsieur! I could not do it—and how dull my days would be! You would be away teaching in close, noisy school-rooms from morning till evening, and I should be lingering at home unemployed and solitary; I should get depressed and sullen and you will soon tire of me.” (208-209)

Crimsworth’s response to Frances’s request is to assure her that he is capable of supporting them. His statement that her working would result in a sacrifice of comfort not only implies that she would lose her “rest,” but also that he would lose some of the domestic comfort he expects from a wife. Crimsworth’s response here conforms to cultural expectations about his role as husband. Frances’s reaction to his news of three thousand francs is not joy at the increased means the money will offer, but perturbation that he will be making so much more than she. Brontë creates a woman who, in 1846, wants professional equity not only of position, but of salary.

Crimsworth's authority is further undercut by Frances's obvious ignoring of his proud offer of financial support. Crimsworth initially thinks that Frances is considering his proposal and feels pride at being able to support his wife, but Frances is dismayed rather than pleased by his offer. Crimsworth's "I am not sure whether Frances had accorded due attention to my harangue" signals to readers that Crimsworth only partially realizes the depths of Frances's determination to be professionally autonomous. The reader realizes that Frances had definitely not "accorded due attention" to his offer to support her because she does not want to be supported. By the end of the proposal scene, Crimsworth accepts Frances's request to continue working.

While the negotiation of the terms of Frances's labor occurs in dialogue, the presentation of Crimsworth and Frances as shared laborers is incorporated into Crimsworth's subsequent narration. After the marriage, Crimsworth says, "Our week's holiday glided by and we re-addressed ourselves to labor. Both my wife and I began in good earnest with the notion that we were working-people, destined to earn our bread by exertion and that of the most assiduous kind" (227). This demonstrates Crimsworth's acceptance of Frances as a working woman. Here, too, is evidence that Brontë's original plan of creating a man who would "labour through life" became by the end of the novel a story of a man and woman laboring (1). It is, of course, also an exaggeration to call their work "of the most assiduous kind," since they have both been in much worse occupational positions.

Continuing to work while earning less than Crimsworth and having limited professional authority does not satisfy Frances for long. She desires the autonomy and equality possible only if she has a position of authority. After a year and a half of marriage, Frances tells Crimsworth, “I am not satisfied. . . . You are now earning eight thousand francs a year . . . while I am still at my miserable twelve hundred francs—I *can* do better, and I *will*” (228). When Crimsworth replies that she works as long and as diligently as he does, she replies, “Yes, Monsieur, but I am not working in the right way, and I am convinced of it” (228). It is not enough to work because Frances enjoys no professional autonomy as a teacher in someone else’s school and because she does not make as much money as her husband. While Frances’s work during this time is not part of the direct narration, she clearly indicates that her dissatisfaction and lack of success in her position at Mdlle. Reuters’s pensionnat is due to the lack of autonomy of her position. She tells Crimsworth, “I work under difficulties; here I only teach sewing, I can shew no power in sewing, no superiority—it is a subordinate art” (133). Working “the right way” requires authority and autonomy.

Frances conceives a plan which would give her professional autonomy and a more equitable income. Interestingly, the plan is not related in dialogue. Rather, after Frances introduces her dissatisfaction in dialogue, Crimsworth narrates the summary of the plan to the narratee:

“What was her plan?” A natural one—the next step to be mounted by us, or at least by her, if she wanted to rise in her profession. She proposed to begin a school. . . .

I put no obstacle in her way; raised no objection; I knew she was not one who could live quiescent and inactive or even comparatively inactive. Duties she must have to fulfill, and important duties; work to do, and exciting, absorbing, profitable work; strong faculties stirred in her frame and they demanded full nourishment, free exercise: mine was not the hand ever to starve or cramp them; no, I delighted in offering them sustenance and in clearing them wider space for action.

“You have conceived a plan, Frances,” said I, “and a good plan; execute it; you have my free consent, and wherever and whenever my assistance is wanted, ask and you shall have.” (229)

Here again Frances’s narrative is implied, with only the abridged “she proposed to begin a school” in place of whatever carefully crafted plan she related to Crimsworth.

Frances asks for, and receives, permission to start her own school. She is in a patriarchal society and cannot act without her husband’s permission and financial support, but the request is highly unusual, and Crimsworth’s response even more so. He agrees to her plan and supports her, thereby creating a marriage where a husband sanctions and encourages his wife’s professional autonomy. But Frances must continue to labor as a wife as well. She and Crimsworth have one son, Victor. It is

clear to the implied reader that Crimsworth is jealous of Frances's attentions to their son. He describes Frances's leaving to check on their infant son as "abandoning" him, and thinks that she coddles him. Annette Tromly says that Frances "evidently goes through the motions of living up to Crimsworth's happy ending—but were she to tell the story, we feel certain that her version would be vastly different" (38).

Based on Crimsworth's negligent—even cruel¹⁸—treatment of Victor, Frances's tears on their wedding day, and his clear misunderstanding of her feelings, I certainly agree, but argue that her story is both told and heard in the implied narrative. It is possible to reconstruct Frances's story, and though she does not tell her story directly, it is told nonetheless.

The negotiation between Crimsworth and Frances, and the underlying power struggle, not only involves words, it also involves physical manipulation. Throughout the novel, Crimsworth is careful to narrate his carnal control. He attempts to obscure his gaze upon female bodies, especially Frances's, but this obscuration is undermined by the implied narrative. His denial of the gaze, coupled with his obvious looking, and Frances's ability to use physicality to manipulate him, undermines his professed lack of carnal interest. When Crimsworth is shown to his room at M. Pelet's pensionnat and learns that it is boarded up because it overlooks the garden of Middle Reuter's girls' pensionnat, he "[scrutinizes] closely the nailed boards, hoping to find some chink or crevice which I might enlarge and so get a peep at the consecrated ground" (58). While he claims that he "thought it would have been so pleasant to

¹⁸ In one scene, Crimsworth shoots Victor's dog because it has contracted rabies, and then leaves it for Victor to find.

have looked out upon a garden planted with flowers and trees, so amusing to have watched the demoiselles at their play—to have studied female character in a variety of phases,” the fact that he wants to remove the intentional barriers to his male gaze upon the young girls is suspect (58-59). As previously discussed, Crimsworth refuses to narrate Frances’s physical appearance when he first introduces her, claiming that he only gradually came to know her physical features (112). In this direct address to the reader, Crimsworth’s professed lack of attention to her physical attributes draws attention to them for the reader attempting to construct Frances’s implied narrative. His later descriptions of her physically blooming before him as a result of his intellectual tutelage are also suspect due to his unreliability. He portrays his physical interest in her as being secondary to his intellectual interest, but the attention given to his *not* telling, coupled with his claiming credit for her physical as well as intellectual blossoming, highlights Crimsworth’s interest in Frances’s body.

It is clear in the proposal scene and in subsequent negotiations about Frances’s professional position that Frances is very aware that she can use Crimsworth’s physical attraction to her to her advantage. The proposal itself is prefaced by Crimsworth physically detaining Frances. He narrates:

There are impulses we can control, but there are others which control us, because they attain us with a tiger-leap and are our masters ere we have seen them. . . . I know I did not reason, I did not plan or intend, yet whereas, one moment I was sitting solus on the chair near the table,

the next, I held Frances on my knee, placed there with sharpness and decision, and retained with exceeding tenacity. (205)

Crimsworth, his passion overcoming his reason (at least according to him), takes physical control of Frances's body as he proposes. Although Frances is prevented from getting up, she uses this physical closeness to her advantage during the proposal negotiation. After she says that she will marry him and says that she would like to continue teaching, she holds his hand tightly. When he consents to her working, he asks for a kiss as a reward: "You speak God's truth," said I, at last; "and you shall have your own way, for it is the best way. Now, as a reward for such ready consent, give me a voluntary kiss" (209). This voluntary kiss is, of course, requested while he is still forcibly retaining her in his lap. After the marriage negotiation, Crimsworth openly admires Frances:

I know not whether Frances was really much altered since I first saw her, but as I looked at her now, I felt that she was singularly changed for me. . . now I saw a face dressed in graces; smile, dimple and rosy tint rounded its contours and brightened its hues. . . . for me, Frances had physical charms; in her there was no deformity to get over; none of those prominent defects . . . which hold at bay the admiration of the boldest male champions of intellect. . . had she been either "édentée, myope, rugueuse ou bossue" my feelings towards her might still have been kindly but they could never have been impassioned. . . . It

appeared then, that I too was a sensualist, in my temperate and fastidious way. (209-210)

After they are married, Crimsworth can admit that she had physical charms, even though he claims not to have seen them before the marriage. These physical negotiations continue after they are married.

When Frances proposes starting a school, Crimsworth is again distracted by her body during the conversation and demands a kiss. He says,

“Kiss me, Mrs. Crimsworth,” was not my very apposite reply—but she looked so engaging in her light summer dress and little cottage bonnet, and her manner in speaking to me was then, as always, so unaffectedly and suavely respectful, that my heart expanded at the sight of her, and a kiss seemed necessary to content its importunity. (228)

After he agrees, Frances “possessed herself of [his] hand too, and held it for some time very close clasped in both her own” (229-30). When discussing the success of Frances’s school and her nightly return to their sitting room to be his submissive wife, he says “ever at that hour, as I entered our private sitting-room—the lady directress vanished and Frances Henri, my own little lace-mender, was magically restored *to my arms*” (232, my emphasis). But even in their private sitting room, Frances teases him and challenges his “‘bizarreries anglaises,’ [his] ‘caprices insulaires,’ with a wild and witty wickedness that made a perfect white demon of her while it lasted” (233). She gets away with this by physically submitting to him:

I used to turn upon her with my old decision, and arrest bodily the sprite that teased me. Vain idea! no sooner had I grasped hand or arm, than the elf was gone; the provocative smile quenched in the expressive brown eyes, and a ray of gentle homage shone under the lids in its place: I had seized a mere vexing fairy and found a submissive and supplicating little mortal woman in my arms. (233)

In order to have professional autonomy, Frances must be domestically and physically submissive, but even this submission is strategic. Frances understands exactly how far she can push him, and how to physically appease his anger. In traditional Victorian power arrangements, the woman had more power in the domestic space, where she had control over the operation of the household (though always with the husband as the nominal head of that household and with ultimate control of finances, etc). In *The Professor*, Frances has less authority in the domestic space than she does in her professional space. Even though she has some power of manipulation, she has to give up domestic autonomy in order to have professional autonomy. Of course, the very fact that she continued working after marriage when it was not economically required for the survival is revolutionary.

Jennifer Ruth, in “Between Labour and Capital,”¹⁹ claims that *The Professor* creates a professional space specifically for intellectual labor, and recognizes that Frances is the person who is laboring at the novel’s close, but she does not examine the gendered nature of this shift from emphasis on Crimsworth’s professionalization

¹⁹ This article also appears as Chapter 1 of Ruth’s book, *Novel Professions: Interested Disinterest and the Making of the Professional in the Victorian Novel*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2006.

to Frances's. While Ruth recognizes that "studying this novel, in which the protagonist wishes to uncover rather than cover over the price of his intellectual labor, will help correct the balance of critical studies of professionalism," she stops short of recognizing the most significant goal of the novel's presentation of professionalism: creating a space for Frances to become a professional (279). Like most studies of professionalization, Brontë criticism has either focused on the male professionals (like Ruth's article above), or discussed the lack of professional options available to women (as in Roslyn Belkin's article, "Rejects of the Marketplace: Old Maids in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*", which I will discuss in Chapter 3). I argue that Brontë uses intellectual professions to blur class lines and subvert patriarchy by representing professional women.²⁰

In *The Professor*, the intellectual profession is teaching. By the end of the novel, Frances, "Madame the Directress," the former lace-mender, is "polishing off" English heiresses and the children of the best families in Brussels (230). The rank of

²⁰ Class is a complicated issue in *The Professor*. Brontë states in her preface that Crimsworth is a hero who "works his way through life as. . . real living men work theirs," yet no working-class men have Eton educations at the time, nor is Crimsworth equated with the other workers when he works in his brother's mill's counting house. Crimsworth's lineage, his education, and his work history combine to blur his class position. Frances also blurs class lines. She goes from being self-educated to educating. Neither is without social ambition, but their goals are contrasted to the coarser goals of characters like Crimsworth's brother, whose social climbing is marked by mistreatment of people, advancement through the physical labor of others, and greed. Both Crimsworth and Frances are identified with "a literate, cultured class" (Newman 12). Terry Eagleton states that "Crimsworth is able to make classic bourgeois progress—not, however, on the crudely materialistic terms of his brother, but in ways which utilise rather than negate his 'genteel' accomplishments" (33). While I do not have space for a full class analysis here, an expanded analysis of class that more takes into account Frances's professional empowerment would be a useful future addition to work on class in the novel. Discussion of class in the novel can be found in: Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1975; and Neville Newman, "Workers, Gentlemen and Landowners: Identifying Social Class in *The Professor* and *Wuthering Heights*. *Brontë Society Transactions*. 26:1 (2001): 10-18.

Frances's students are listed not to mark a class preference, but to mark Frances's success. Crimsworth says of Frances,

As to Julia and Georgiana G_____—daughters of an English baronet—as to Mde. Mathilde de _____ heiress of a Belgian Count, and sundry other children of patrician race, the Directress was careful of them as of the others, anxious for their progress, as for that of the rest—but it never seemed to enter her head to distinguish them by a mark of preference—one girl of noble blood she loved dearly, a young Irish baroness, Lady Catherine _____, but it was for her enthusiastic heart and clever head—for her generosity and her genius—the title and rank went for nothing. (232)

Although Crimsworth's narration is the only legitimation of this claim to Frances's lack of class bias, there is nothing in the implied narrative that contradicts this perspective. In fact, it is Crimsworth who wants their son Victor to go to Eton, and Frances who does not. Although Frances rises from the working class, her work after her marriage is not done out of financial necessity. Rather, she chooses to work because she wants to feel no encumbrance to her husband.

When the novel ends, Frances is married with a child and running her own school. Frances herself has two personas: successful businesswoman and domestic wife and mother. After they are married and Frances starts the school, Crimsworth says of her,

As to this same Mrs. Crimsworth—in one sense she was become another woman, though in another she remained unchanged. So different was she under different circumstances I seemed to possess two wives. . . .

In the day-time my house and establishment were conducted by Madame the Directress, a stately and elegant woman, bearing much anxious thought on her large brow; much calculated dignity in her serious mien: immediately after breakfast I used to part with this lady; I went to my college, she to her school-room. . . . it was her pleasure, her joy to make me still the Master in all things.

At six o'clock p.m. my daily labours ceased—I then came home, for my home was my heaven—ever at that hour, as I entered our private-sitting room—the lady-directress vanished from before my eyes, and Frances Henri, my own little lace-mender, was magically restored to my arms. (230-232)

In order to achieve professional autonomy, Frances must have two roles. One is the professional directress, the second is the domestic wife and mother. Interestingly, the birth of France's only child does not seem to affect her professional activities at all. Crimsworth accepts this arrangement, but marks Frances as his subordinate in other ways. At home, Frances is "his own little lace-mender," referring to him as Master and Monsieur and always presents her revolutionary proposals with an air of submission.

Just as she creates a tenor of submissiveness by maintaining formal titles, Frances creates an aura of domesticity at home that allows Crimsworth to accept her professional autonomy. In this way, neither Crimsworth's narrative nor Frances's occupation is an overt threat to societal norms on the surface. But the implied narrative of Frances's professional and personal empowerment subverts the patriarchal control of profession, narration, and marriage. In "Woman as Lacemaker: The Development of a Literary Stereotype in Texts by Charlotte Brontë, Nerval, Lainé, and Chawaf," Nichola Anne Haxel claims that Frances's complicity in patriarchy is demonstrated by her pupil-like deference to Crimsworth. Instead, I read Frances's deference to Crimsworth as intentional and subversive. Frances maintains the façade of patriarchal submission in the home, while enjoying autonomy in her professional life. Likewise, Crimsworth's male narration of Frances's empowerment maintains the façade of patriarchal control, while Frances's implied narrative subverts this domination by allowing Frances to speak for herself, to maintain her right to continue working after marriage, to decry Crimsworth's ability to make more money than her as a male teacher, and even to suggest and to start her own school.

This kind of autonomy is not possible in isolation; it requires the cooperation of her husband, but the professional authority and autonomy that she achieves is her own. Thus, the concept of relational autonomy—as discussed in my introduction—is essential to understanding the possibility of any space for individual power within a communal dynamic, especially since Frances's power is restricted to her professional space alone, and this power relies in large part on her subjection in the domestic

sphere. Crimsworth's acquiescence to Frances's plans does not mean that this marriage is ideal, even by nineteenth-century standards. Although Frances enjoys Crimsworth's company and the intellectual stimulation he offers, she must lose some independence when she marries. Crimsworth finds her crying on her wedding day. When he tells her that he's sorry that she is in low spirits, "She only said 'it was impossible to help it,' and then voluntarily though hurriedly putting her hand into [his], accompanied [him] out of the room, and ran down stairs . . . like one who was eager to get some formidable piece of business over" (226). But marriage does offer Frances both companionship and an opportunity for career advancement. She is able to manipulate Crimsworth into agreeing to her professional plans, but the fact that she has to seek his agreement before she can carry out her plans marks the restriction of her autonomy to the professional sphere. In order to have any autonomy at all, she must have two personas. "Equality" happens only in the workplace. In the home, Frances must maintain and even amplify her submissiveness to her husband. Only by remaining Crimsworth's "own little lace-mender" at home can Frances be "Madame the Directress" at work. In this way, Brontë empowers Frances while exposing patriarchy. In an 1851 letter to George Smith, her publisher, Brontë says of *The Professor*:

The Professor's merits, I plainly perceive, will never be owned by anybody but Mr. Williams and me; very particular and unique must be our penetration, and I think highly of us both accordingly. You may allege that that merit is not visible to the naked eye. Granted; but the

smaller the commodity the more inestimable its value. (5 February
1851 in Smith, Volume II 572)

Where is this value, if not visible to the naked eye? Just under the surface narrative,
in an implied narrative of female empowerment.

CHAPTER TWO
“Speak I Must”:
Jane Eyre’s Self Narration

“*Speak* I must: I had been trodden on severely, and *must* turn: but how?” Jane, the retrospective narrator and controlling voice of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, speaks these words of desperation early in the novel (30, emphasis original). The rest of the novel answers this question. Jane learns quickly that speech can instigate action, and her struggle to find the most effective means of articulation is the driving force of the novel. All of the major shifts of the novel revolve around episodes of Jane’s rediscovering her ability to effectively articulate her own identity. Like many nineteenth-century novels, *Jane Eyre* explores the construction of self-identity through narration. Through regaining control of the narrative of her life, Jane is able to shape and control her self-identity. My study analyzes the novel in terms of the development of Jane’s narrative voice, and traces the progressive strengthening of her sense of self-identity and entitlement, in order to understand her narrative empowerment as an author at the novel’s close.

The formation of this voice can be traced by examining episodes of narration of Jane’s life. Jane’s level of control (or lack of control) of the narration of her life marks the amount of control she has over her personal situation at any given point in the novel. Jane loses control of her narration when she subsumes her voice in order to create and/or maintain social relationships. Her desire to have an autonomous self-identity is constantly at war with her desire for companionship. Jane must learn how to have a social relationship without losing narrative, and thus personal, control.

Once she learns this lesson, Jane presents her story as a written autobiography, making her personal success a professional one as well.

The danger inherent in narrating a self-identity is that other people also have the power of narration. This threat is especially true for Jane who because she is a woman. Jane is constantly defined by those around her, and Jane (the internal focalizer) believes that she must accept this definition in order to have social bonds. As an orphan starving for social acceptance and love, Jane represents the larger quandary of nineteenth-century women: how to gain and maintain autonomy without being ostracized. In each case an event predicates a self revelation that instigates Jane to reject her socially constructed self identity and re-narrate herself. This revoicing allows her to alter her situation, and also results in a social shift. Once she has redefined herself she cannot remain in the social sphere that constrained her. To demonstrate this process I will explore instances of others' narrations of Jane's story in the text as well as the counter-narratives presented by Jane herself as she rejects the socially defined identity placed on her.

The re-narrations of Jane's identity that lead to plot and location shifts in the novel also lead to shifts in her position as a worker. Jane begins to work as a teacher at Lowood, and continues as a governess at Thornfield, a teacher at Moor House, and an author at Ferndean. When working as a teacher and governess, Jane is always working underneath someone else's authority. Her class status also shifts throughout the novel, and both her class and working positions affect her level of autonomy. Only after Jane receives an independent fortune does she become free to take

complete control of her life and career as an author. At the novel's close, Jane has independent wealth, is in control of her relationship with Rochester, and has a profession, writing, that is autonomous.

To trace Jane's vocal and narrative development, I will utilize narrative theory. At its simplest, narratology designates voice as the answer to the question, "who is speaking?" in narrative discourse.²¹ For feminist theorists, voice signifies not just the act of speaking, but the power to speak, especially against attempts to oppress the speech and opinions of less powerful communities. As Susan Lanser states in *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, "Despite compelling interrogations of 'voice' as a humanist fiction, for the collectively and personally silenced the term has become a trope of identity and power: as Luce Irigaray suggests, to find a voice (*voix*) is to find a way (*voie*)" (3).²² Feminist narratologists, including Lanser, have emphasized the importance of analysis of voice in studying the politics of narration. An analysis of voice is particularly applicable in my study of *Jane Eyre* because it is precisely the moments in which Jane does and does not speak her own story that demonstrate her level of empowerment.

Jane Eyre is explicitly marked as "public" by virtue of being published, but its form is that of recording for the public a private life as manifested in its being labeled an

²¹ See chapter five of Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* for a full discussion of voice from a structuralist perspective.

²² Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 209.

“autobiography.”²³ This text is not simply a fiction told in the first person. Rather, it can be seen as a willful creation of a female self, a self that must struggle to define and voice itself. According to Susan Lanser, “One of the earliest fictional autobiographies directed to a public naratee, *Jane Eyre* has no precedent in the authority it claims for a female personal voice” (*Fictions of Authority* 177). Women’s studies has long focused on finding and examining a “woman’s voice” in literature. Female writers, especially those under a domineering patriarchy such as that of the nineteenth century, must struggle to voice a strong identity using the only language available to them: that created by and for the patriarchy. This mode of inquiry is not new, but I hope to provide new answers to this issue through applying feminist

²³ Jerome Beaty discusses the importance of *Jane Eyre* as a fictional autobiography in the first chapter of his book, *Misreading Jane Eyre* (1996). Beaty points out that,

In the novel itself there is no trace of an editor—no preface, footnotes, afterward, or interpolation of any kind, no single word that is not ‘Jane’s.’ The fictional editor nonetheless puts the entire text in boldface quotation marks, makes the first-person autobiographer into a ‘third person’ to the first person of the ‘invisible’ editor. (12)

While I see this as evidence of Brontë’s emphasis on this story being Jane’s and no other’s, Beaty believes that the lack of these editorial tools further confuses Jane’s identity. Beaty also points out that autobiography at the time (a relatively new genre) “tended toward the internal and analytical or psychological” (14). As Brontë’s writing in *Jane Eyre* is specifically concerned with the internal analytical and psychological behavior of the character, I agree that this was Brontë’s understanding of autobiography.

narratological theory to *Jane Eyre*.²⁴ Like Lanser, I believe that combining an analysis of women's "issues" with the text itself will help reveal how Charlotte Brontë tackles this difficult problem.

Brontë presents a model of female empowerment by demonstrating through the narrative how Jane gains narrative mastery. She does this by creating a retrospective, empowered narrator who focalizes through the character Jane as she matures and learns how to narrate. The term focalization was coined by Gérard Genette in his book *Figures II* in 1969 and elucidated in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* in 1980. Focalization is a term that is used to differentiate who is seeing and who is speaking. Although focalization is most frequently used when discussing third-person narration, Genette states that it is possible to have internal focalization (focalization through a character inside the narrative) through the hero of retrospective first-person narration, but believes that it is typically reducible to

²⁴ In her article, "Finding a Voice: Towards a Woman's Discourse of Dialogue in the Narration of *Jane Eyre*," Joan Peters traces parodies of other narrative forms and types of discourse within the novel to suggest that Brontë is undermining patriarchal novel form in order to create a "woman's" voice. Peters uses Julia Kristeva's description of a woman's voice as one "set in direct contrast to prevailing patriarchal modes of discourse" (219). Peters further asserts that the woman's voice in *Jane Eyre* is "a voice conceived in a spirit of dialogue" and sees the progression of Jane's vocalization into a more dialogic state as Brontë's means of reclaiming the novel as a place where "sentimental" narration—traditionally considered "female" narration—meets with more "intellectual," factual narration—traditionally associated with men's novels—in order to create full communication between the novel and reader. To prove her hypothesis, Peters traces three stages of discourse within the novel to suggest that Brontë is parodying novelistic conventions that fail to establish a successful discourse. The third stage of discourse, which begins with Jane's stay at Moor House and runs through the novel's end, suggests a new voice for the novel: a "woman's" voice that is, "engaged in a dialogue—a genuine, mutually-controlled interplay of feelings and ideas between novel and reader" (219). Peters thinks that this dialogue culminates in Jane's verbal progression as a character when she "achieves a state of on-going undissembled dialogue with Rochester" (219). This dialogue, according to Peters, is conducted by Jane and Rochester as equals. As I will discuss later, while I agree that Brontë is creating a "woman's" voice, I do not believe it is sufficient for Jane to be equal to Rochester. To regain her voice, Jane must vocally master Rochester as he has mastered her. I also think that Jane's mastery of voice does not come until the Ferndean section of the novel.

paralipses (*Narrative Discourse* 198-199).²⁵ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, emphasizes the importance of focalization in first-person retrospective narratives. She asserts that, “As far as focalization is concerned, there is no difference between third-person centre of consciousness and first-person retrospective narration. In both, the focalizer is a character within the represented world” (73).

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane, the retrospective narrator almost always narrates,²⁶ but usually this narration is focalized through the character Jane. This is especially obvious when the character Jane is a child. For example, when Jane is locked away in the red room, the narrator relates Jane’s terror of seeing her dead uncle’s ghost as follows:

I wiped my tears and hushed my sobs, fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face, bending over me with strange pity. . . . My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort. (13-14)²⁷

²⁵ Paralipsis is narration in which the narrator tells less than she knows.

²⁶ There are instances of intradiegetic and hypodiegetic narration, which will be discussed later.

²⁷ Robyn Warhol also discusses this scene and the relationship between the narrator and the character’s point of view in “Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*.” She refers to the situation in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* as a “double narrative perspective,” which is “a textualized splitting of the fictional self, a doubleness of narrative perspective” (860).

The language used to describe her experiences is that of an adult—the adult is speaking—but the experiences are told from the perspective of a child—the child is seeing.

The presence of focalized narration throughout most of the novel highlights the moments where the retrospective narrator interjects into the narration in the form of a metalepsis, or a breaking of barriers between diegetic levels. In *Jane Eyre*, metalepses are marked by shifts into present tense, where the retrospective reader breaks into the retrospective time sequence to either reveal information unknown by Jane the character (and thus unfocalizable), or to make a statement that transcends the retrospective bounds of the story and includes the feelings of both the narrator and the character.

This juxtaposition of the narration of an older, wiser Jane and the experiences of the character Jane as she is growing into that woman allows the reader to trace Jane's development into a woman with full narrative power. To distinguish these narrative levels in my discussion, I will refer to passages focalized through Jane the character as being internally focalized, and I will refer to the passages told from the perspective of the retrospective narrator as externally focalized. Though Lanser and others²⁸ have begun to explore narrative intricacies in *Jane Eyre*, not enough attention has been paid to the importance of the impact of the development of Jane the focalizer into Jane the narrator. *Jane Eyre* must be understood as a first-person retrospective narrative before one can truly comprehend the importance of Jane's

²⁸ Including the studies mentioned throughout this chapter.

voice. It is crucial to understand that Jane is telling her story from her position as a dominant, vocal woman with a fully formed self identity. But it is equally important to see the development of Jane into that person.²⁹

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar altered Jane Eyre studies forever with their publication of "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress," which is part of their larger study entitled *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Gilbert and Gubar's approach to Jane Eyre is psychoanalytic. They see Jane as an angry, repressed person whose frustration manifests itself in the form of Bertha Mason Rochester. Bertha is, in this study, Jane's alter ego, who acts out the repressed anger and passion that Jane is unable to demonstrate herself. While this study is pivotal because it recognizes the underlying feminist urges of the novel, I believe it misinterprets the outlet of this suppression and underestimates Jane's eventual mastery of herself and her story. While recognizing Jane's feminism, Gilbert and Gubar ultimately conclude that Brontë "was

²⁹ Rosemarie Bodenheimer's article "Jane Eyre in Search of Her Story" (1980) focuses on the process by which Jane learns to tell her own story. She believes that Jane's progress in the novel revolves around "finding a fit audience for whom she can give a proper shape to her own story (389)," and that "the search for audience is essentially a search for love and human connection (394)". I disagree with the basic concept that Jane is seeking an audience in the characters. I posit instead that Jane must move from relying on other characters in order to realize that she does not have to subsume her voice to be accepted and loved. Jane is searching for acceptance not through her storytelling, but through her silence. She subverts her own voice to gain acceptance. Though she uses her storytelling art to draw Rochester back into a relationship at the novel's close, she is not searching for an audience; she is demonstrating her vocal independence and superiority. I do agree with Bodenheimer that Jane seeks love, and that she is demonstrating a responsible use of power in the last scene with Rochester. However, Bodenheimer does not discuss the novel in terms of retrospection. Bodenheimer says, "If Jane grows up to be a successful narrator, she is not—at least not yet—the narrator of *Jane Eyre*, whose vision depends on the tense truth of the discontinuity between fierce feeling and credible story (395)." Though she makes a distinction between the narrator and character, Bodenheimer fails to recognize the narrator as a retrospective Jane, and the character as an internal focalizer. Without realizing the retrospective nature of the novel, Bodenheimer cannot present an accurate and complete picture of Jane's development as a storyteller.

unable clearly to envision viable solutions to the problem of patriarchal oppression” (369). I believe that there is a solution presented by Jane, who does escape patriarchal oppression. This solution lies in the mastery of language. Jane becomes the voice of Rochester’s world and the confessor of his secrets as well as an articulate spokesperson on her own behalf.

The problem of navigating a patriarchal language system to create a woman’s narrative is mirrored in Jane the internal focalizer’s struggle to maintain and form an autonomous self while interacting with and desiring social companionship. Neither a narrated voice nor a life is created/lived in isolation. Jane’s struggle to define herself as autonomous while remaining part of a larger social world mirrors Brontë’s struggle to define a female self identity with a patriarchally-defined language. This connection is emphasized in the novel’s construction. Each plot shift in the novel revolves around a social change and a location shift predicated on Jane revoicing herself. In each environment, Jane subsumes her self-narration and remains silent in order to conform to her social situation. Jane realizes this about herself. In a metalepsis during Jane’s narration of her obedience to St. John Rivers, Jane, externally focalizing, states:

I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive, hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. I have always faithfully observed the one, up to the very moment of bursting, sometimes with volcanic vehemence, into the other. (352)

A disruption in the acceptance of Jane's social environment forces her to disown her socially defined self and re-narrate her identity in order to reclaim her independent self. This reclamation and advancement is always made possible by an active renarration of her identity.³⁰ In each instance Jane re-narrates herself, reclaiming narrative and social power that she had previously relinquished.

The importance of these moments of transition is emphasized by the presence of the extradiegetic³¹ retrospective narrator, who is voicing this shift from the position of narrative authority and social stability and dominance. By analyzing the extradiegetic narrator from the perspective of the internal focalizer, I argue that a third subtext can be disclosed: one that emphasizes the challenges faced by a woman to articulate a strong female self in a socially acceptable and accessible manner. This subtext is subversive and powerful, allowing Jane to voice herself within a patriarchal

30 One of the few scholarly works that focuses specifically on Jane's speech is Janet Freeman's essay "Speech and Silence in *Jane Eyre*" (1984). Freeman recognizes the importance of speech in the novel. She says, "Words have power, in *Jane Eyre*. They also bestow power. They are the instrument by which Jane Eyre learns to understand and master the world" (690). Freeman also discusses the development of Jane's narratives of her life story. But Freeman fails to see the development of autobiographical storytelling as a crucial part of Jane's vocal empowerment. Freeman says at the end of her article, "Her considerable skill at written narrative, as far as we know, blossomed in total secrecy: when she learned to talk and to listen, Jane somehow learned to write" (699). Freeman assumes because "not one of those narratives told to her, told of her, or told by her was ever written down" that writing "is a skill that need not be studied or practiced—so long as one pays attention to speech" (699). This assumption undermines the importance of Jane's writing her own autobiography. It also fails to realize the importance of all forms of narrative voice in the novel. For example, Jane's written advertisement for a new position is one of the most important self narrations in the novel. And Jane's dominance at the novel's close is exemplified not only in her voicing Rochester's surroundings to him, but in her reading and writing for him. Freeman recognizes the importance of Jane's developing narrative without realizing that it is the novel itself that demonstrates Jane's mastery of the art of autobiographic storytelling. I also disagree with Freeman's proposed role of silence in the novel. She believes that speech and silence are inseparable, and that Jane is finding her voice while she is remaining silent. I strongly disagree and see the silences as moments where Jane is repressing her own speech, and her voicings as outbursts forced out of her by desperate situations. Silence is not a necessary time of learning, but a sinister threat to Jane's independence.

³¹ An extradiegetic narrator is a narrator who narrates from a position outside of the story. See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 228-231.

mode by simultaneously revealing the restrictions created by that mode. To perform this analysis I am utilizing Susan Lanser's classification of "public narration" as narration where the audience is a public readership (*Feminist Narratology* 620-621). Jane the extradiegetic narrator constantly reminds the reader that this autobiography is intended to be read by the public. There are 36 passages directly addressed to the reader. These episodes, marked as narrative breaks and criticized by many critics, are important episodes where this narrator is clearly indicating an awareness of the importance of audience. These breaks are used for specific purposes: to overtly and directly challenge patriarchal norms, and to indicate to the reader important information about Jane the character's thought process that she as an internal focalizer cannot realize. Brontë leads the readers on the same journey as that portrayed through Jane the character, so that we can learn Jane's lessons about voice.

In the first section of the novel, which occurs while Jane is at Gateshead, the extradiegetic narrator presents her as a lonely child who desperately craves acceptance and love. Her relatives' disregard for her has formed Jane into a quiet, self-conscious child who hides away whenever possible. But Jane is not allowed to stay quietly sequestered. The novel begins with her struggle to voice a defense against the people who persecute her.

Jane's first rebellious act in the novel is voicing her disapproval to John Reed. She says to him, "Wicked and cruel boy! . . . 'You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!" (8). This is the first time that Jane vocally challenges her disapproval of her ill-treatment, and John punishes her by

attacking her physically. Jane's physical retaliation against John's attack leads to her imprisonment in the red room. It is interesting that the greater punishment here is because of Jane's physical response, though it is her voice that has set the action into motion. This episode is the first of a series of events involving Jane's increasing use of her voice that lead directly to her removal from Gateshead and the first major shift in the novel.

Jane's motivation for being silenced in the novel is her desire for acceptance. People in positions of authority continuously teach Jane that silence is required for a person in her position. Jane learns from a young age that she should be mindful of her subservient status. After being carried to the red room, Jane the externally focalizing narrator emphasizes this aspect of her early upbringing. While Miss Abbot and Bessie are reprimanding her, Jane says, "This reproach of my dependence had become a vague song-song in my ear; very painful and crushing" (10). Miss Abbot tells Jane, "it is your place to be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to [the Reeds]" and warns her that

God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums. . . Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, . . . for if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney, and fetch you away. (10)

For Miss Abbot, Jane's need to respect her status is equated with acceptance, Christian duty, and even a requirement to avert punishment. These motivations reappear repeatedly throughout the novel, demonstrating that Jane is taught self-

suppression as part of her role as inferior and that minding her station is not only expected, it is vital to her survival and acceptance. Most importantly, it is presented as a requirement for familial acceptance and love.

While the terror instilled by the red room episode quiets Jane, she is not yet silenced. When Mr. Lloyd comes to check on Jane after the red room trauma, he asks Jane a series of questions about what caused her to be so upset. Bessie immediately speaks for Jane in answer to each question, but Jane refutes Bessie's explanations and tells Mr. Lloyd (as best she can) why she is unhappy. This is Jane's first attempt at self-narration and, though not cohesive or clearly narrated, it does instigate her removal from Gateshead. Jane, again externally focalizing, says of her narration,

How difficult it was to frame any answer. Children can feel, but they cannot analyse their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words. Fearful, however, of losing this first and only opportunity of relieving my grief by imparting it, I, after a disturbed pause, contrived to frame a meager, though, as far as it went, true response. (19)

She cannot fully articulate her self narrative, and has no control over her own situation, but this attempt is enough for Mr. Lloyd to suggest school to Mrs. Reed, which is the first step of Jane's being sent away; but Mrs. Reed does not act on this suggestion until Jane again speaks out in retaliation and self definition.

When Jane overhears Mrs. Reed telling her children not to associate with her, she “[cries] out suddenly, and without at all deliberating on [her] words,—“They are not fit to associate with me”” and asks Mrs. Reed what her husband would think about the way she treats Jane (22). This speech marks the last action that occurs prior to Mr. Brocklehurst’s arrival. This is the first time that Jane talks back to Mrs. Reed and reclaims the right to narrate her own self identity, but Jane the intradiegetic narrator has no control over her speech here. Jane says retrospectively, “it seemed as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance: something spoke out of me over which I had no control” (23). The young Jane is beginning to learn the power of speech but has not yet learned to control it.

Jane’s lack of narrative control is apparent in the next scene. When Mrs. Reed tells Mr. Brocklehurst that Jane is deceitful, Jane is deeply wounded by this attack on her character and responds (after Mr. Brocklehurst’s departure) with what is perhaps the most impassioned speech in the novel:

I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved *you*; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed; and this book about the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I. . . . I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up: and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable

cruelty. . . . How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the *truth*. You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity. I shall remember how you thrust me back—roughly and violently thrust me back—into the red-room, and locked me up there, to my dying day; though I was in agony; though I cried out, while suffocating with distress, ‘Have mercy! Have mercy, aunt Reed!’ And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me—knocked me down for nothing. I will tell anybody who asks me questions this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you are bad; hard-hearted.

You are deceitful! (30-31)

This speech is by far the longest, most direct speech that Jane gives in the entire book. She challenges Mrs. Reed and, through this speech, threatens to reveal Mrs. Reed’s conduct to others, thereby indicating that Jane’s voice is her only weapon against the Reeds’ oppression. She does write of Mrs. Reed’s behavior, but only after her aunt is dead and after she forgives and makes peace with Mrs. Reed. This speech also reveals the motivations behind Jane’s sudden outburst and establishes many indicators of the trustworthiness of Jane’s narrative voice. Jane is reacting to a charge that is not only slanderous, it is damning to a narrator: she is accused of lying. This response to the accusation of lying is so sudden and fierce that Jane’s hatred of lying and proclamation of honesty ingrains itself into the reader’s mind.

Jane feels free and triumphant immediately after this speech. Mrs. Reed leaves the room and Jane is left standing, “winner of the field,” to exult over her victory; but this elation does not last. Jane the external focalizer understands why and states, “a child cannot quarrel with its elders, as I had done; cannot give its furious feelings uncontrolled play, as I had given mine, without experiencing afterwards the pang of remorse and the chill of reaction” (32). Jane the internal focalizer feels guilty for voicing these hateful words to her elder and her guardian. Jane the external focalizer retrospectively states,

something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time; as aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy: its after-flavour, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned. . . . I would fain exercise some better faculty than that of fierce speaking.

(32)

Although Jane has already learned that speech can instigate action, it is here that she learns how potentially powerful her own speech can be and is frightened by the fierceness of which she finds herself capable. Jane also believes that her position (as a child and as a ward) circumscribes her right to speak out against the Reeds. Jane realizes that her “fierce speaking” has further removed her from her relatives’ affection, permanently removing the possibility of forming a familial bond. Jane will spend the rest of the novel attempting to form bonds with persons in positions of authority over her. Jane views her own speech here as poisonous, but does this regret mean that she will not follow through with her threats of speech? No. In fact,

her next lesson in productive speech comes as a direct result of voicing Mrs. Reeds's cruelties.

At Lowood Jane receives two models of voice: Helen's submissive, restrained voice and Miss Temple's just, moderated voice. Helen's ability to influence Jane stems from their friendship. Helen is the first person with whom Jane forms a strong bond, and this bond allows her a great deal of influence over Jane. Helen's example is tantamount to an enforcement of silence, since she never speaks out against oppression or unfairness and always obeys "without reply and without delay" (51). Indeed, Helen presents Jane with a fundamental Christian theology of submission and passive endurance. Jane does not completely adopt Helen's example, but her theology does permanently influence Jane's self articulation. One of Helen's most important functions in the novel is to teach Jane to analyze her own narrative and think about how convincing it sounds to others. Initially Jane does exactly what she tells Mrs. Reed she will do; she tells Helen about her cruel treatment. When Jane relates to Helen her treatment at Gateshead, she is "bitter and truculent" and speaks "as she [feels], without reserve or softening" (50). Helen teaches Jane that narrative not infused with resentment is more credible (62). Although Jane takes Helen's advice, she finds Helen's lack of voice disturbing. Jane says, "I was silent: Helen had calmed me; but in the tranquility she imparted there was an alloy of inexpressible sadness (61)." Jane learns again to be silent, but she is not comfortable in the silence.

Helen is not Jane's only teacher at Lowood. Jane's apparent submission to Helen's teaching is immediately followed by Miss Temple's request that Jane again

relate her story. Jane breaks silence again, but this time she has learned to temper her story. She says,

I resolved, in the depth of my heart, that I would be most moderate—most correct; and, having reflected a few minutes in order to arrange coherently what I had to say, I told her all the story of my sad childhood. Exhausted by emotion, my language was more subdued than it generally was when it developed that sad theme; and mindful of Helen' warnings against the indulgence of resentment, I infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. This restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible: I felt as I went on that Miss Temple fully believed me. (62)

Jane has learned an important lesson: she has discovered that subdued narration is more effective. Bodenheimer states that this episode “marks the socialization of Jane’s narrative style; the moment when she realizes the power of conscious control” (391). Jane’s impassioned speech to Helen is rebuffed as being harsh and unchristian, but her tempered narration to Miss Temple results in positive action in the form of the public clearing of her name. Her self narration is legitimized and believed, an essential step if a narrated self is to become an actual, autonomous identity.

Thereafter Jane’s speech remains subdued while at Lowood. She fits herself into the institution and serves as both student and teacher.

Jane also finds in Miss Temple a voice that she can use as if it were her own. Not only does Miss Temple corroborate Jane’s story and tell the other students that

Jane is not guilty, she also offers Jane another world-view, one focused on justice. Miss Temple's actions teach Jane that she can use her voice to save herself if she uses it in a measured manner. Unfortunately, Jane does not fully comprehend this power and the implications inherent in that lesson until the end of the novel. Instead, she seems gradually to become Miss Temple's shadow and continues to let Miss Temple speak in her place. Miss Temple offers Jane friendship. Jane craves such acceptance from others, especially by those in authority over her. Once Jane discovers that a subdued voice earns her acceptance at Lowood, she maintains this restraint throughout her time there and beyond. Ironically, this silence is the direct result of verbal success. In "Hazarding Confidences," Lisa Sternlieb points to the fact that Jane stops talking just as she gains the confidence of others and argues that this is a part of the lesson that Jane has learned—to be silent in order to absorb information to be used later (457). I believe instead that Jane is silent at these crucial junctures because she believes silence to be a condition of the confidence and, subsequently, of her relationship with the confider. Jane continues to follow this pattern of submission with persons in positions of authority over her until the end of the novel.

A significant line in the novel occurs when Jane says in chapter ten: "I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence (72)."³² Does this line simply mean that Jane is not relating these eight years; or does it imply that Jane is almost silent during this time, hence there is no story to tell? Jane's subdued voice in chapters eight and

³² Sternlieb discusses this line on page 458 of her article and claims that the syntax suggests "both that Jane omits eight years from her narrative and that the years themselves were spent almost in silence."

nine leads me to believe that Jane is conforming to the expected behavior so closely in order to be accepted at Lowood that there is little of her own story to tell. Jane subdues her voice in order to assimilate into her role as subservient member of a charitable institution, and loses the ability to narrate her self.

Jane retrospectively realizes Miss Temple's tempering force. She externally focalizes,

she had stood me in the stead of mother , governess, and, latterly, companion. . . . I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better-regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was *quiet*; I *believed* I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I *appeared* a disciplined and subdued character. (73, emphasis added)

The italicized words subvert Jane's silence, demonstrating that she only appears to be disciplined and quiet. Jane breaks this narrative silence only when Miss Temple, her role model and a tempering force, leaves her life to be married. When this social bond is removed and Miss *Temple* is no longer present as a *template* Jane is again forced to find and voice her own self identity. When Miss Temple leaves, Jane has lost all motivation for appearing quiet. She says,

In the interval [of an afternoon contemplating the departure of Miss Temple] I had undergone a transforming process; that my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple. . . and that now I was left

in my natural element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions. It did not seem as if a prop were withdrawn, but rather as if a motive were gone; it was not the power to be tranquil which had failed me, but the reason for tranquility was no more. My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. (73-74)

Jane is no longer restricted by her bonds to Miss Temple and Lowood and now craves the “real knowledge” and “excitements” of the “real world,” but this transition from quiet subservience to revoicing her self is never easy.

The language used to describe Jane’s thought process while finding a new path for herself subtly traces a shift in her speech. Jane internally focalizes,

I desired liberty; for liberty I *gasped*; for liberty I *uttered* a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition too seemed swept off into vague space: ‘Then,’ I *cried*, half desperate, ‘grant me at least a new servitude.’ (74, emphasis added)

This passage depicts Jane struggling to regain her own voice, coupled with her feelings of being restricted by her low social status. Jane desires liberty, but she cannot remember how to ask for it. First she gasps, and then she utters a prayer that

is not even strong enough to overpower the faintly blowing wind. Jane's response to this failure is first to follow the template she learned eight years earlier and proceed to "frame a humbler supplication" which is also swept away without being heard. Jane's desperation finally forces her out of the vocal restrictions she has lived under for eight years, and she cries out desperately with her plea. Jane "soliloquized (mentally, be it understood)" and does not talk aloud when she first realizes that a new servitude is possible (75). She begins to narrate for herself the possibility of a new self identity. She has regained the ability to voice her desires to herself; now she must undergo what seems to be a difficult and embarrassing process of regaining her public voice. Jane seeks her new servitude not by vocalizing her request, but by secretly advertising for a new position, using only her own initials. This written advertisement is an important instance of Jane re-narrating her self identity. She defines herself on paper as an independent, educated woman, thereby opening the door to changing her position. She literally narrates herself out of her current situation and into a new future.

Jane's vocal request also reveals a great deal about Jane's estimations of her social position. Jane cries out not for full autonomy but for a "new servitude". When this idea strikes her, she replies (to herself) "A new servitude! There is something in that, . . . I know there is, because it does not sound too sweet. . . . I want this because it is of no use wanting anything better" (75). Jane is very aware of her own social limitations and feels compelled to remain within their confines. The written record of her advertisement includes parenthetical justifications for her lines, as if she is

trying to convince herself and the reader that she is justified in redefining herself and asking even for a position as governess. Jane's quest for freedom here is limited by her awareness of her social status. Just as Jane must learn to overcome her vocal inferiority throughout the novel, she must also learn that she is entitled to more than "a new servitude." Thus, Jane's process of regaining her narrative voice is necessary for—and directly results in—the plot and location shift. It seems that Jane finds it so difficult to speak for herself here that she waits until absolutely necessary before voicing her plan and her request to anyone, revealing the depth of Jane's fear of vocalizing her desires.

Jane's new servitude is a movement from the professional and personal confines of institutional teaching at Lowood to the professional and personal confines of being a governess at Thornfield. As a governess, Jane has more control over her schedule and has only one student to teach, but she is still in a subservient position, as is made clear by her own feelings about her social position and by her treatment by the Ingrams and others. Jane settles herself into this role, but is not completely satisfied in her position. She finds little companionship among the other "servants" and little satisfaction in her role as governess. In a metalepsis that occurs after Jane is settled at Thornfield and prior to Rochester's arrival, the externally focalizing narrator defends her discontent with her position:

This, *par parenthèse*, will be thought cool language by persons who entertain solemn doctrines about the angelic nature of children, and the duty of those charged with their education to conceive for them an

idolatrous devotion: but I am not writing to flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth. (95)

This statement must be externally focalized by the narrator because Jane the character would not be free to express these opinions during her servitude. It is only from the position of authority present for the author, independent heiress, and mother that Jane can make the claim to be *writing* not to flatter, but to tell the truth.

The externally focalized metalepsis continues to express Jane's desire for more out of life:

Anybody may blame me who likes when I add further that now and then, . . . I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach. (95)

Although Jane has accepted her new servitude, she does not feel like her fellow servants are "her kind". She feels that there is more "practical" experience for her, and more like-minded acquaintances.

The metalepsis concludes with what is perhaps the most famous feminist passage in all of Brontë's writing:

Who blames me? Many no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. . . .

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot

find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (95-96)

Many critics have criticized this and other metalepses in the novel as awkward narrative moments that interfere with narrative integrity.³³ I argue instead that these moments are important instances that enhance the narrative thrust of the novel because they allow the empowered author to interject at pivotal moments in Jane the character's development to explain discontents that she cannot yet voice herself as an internal focalizer. They may also be read as indications of the mindset of the retrospective external focalizer. It is not only in the last few pages of the novel that the narrator speaks from her contemporary perspective, the zero point where the

³³ See W.A. Craik, *The Brontë Novels*, London: Methuen, 1968; Mark M. Hennelly, "Jane Eyre's Reading Lesson," *ELH* 51 (1984) among others. Carol Bock also discusses these narrative moments in *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller's Audience* (U of Iowa, 1992). Although Bock does not see these moments as objectionable, she does interpret them differently than I do. Bock sees two storytellers in *Jane Eyre*: Jane herself and Currer Bell, the "implied author" (107).

retrospective narration catches up to the time of the narration (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 27), but she also does so in these passages. The line, “Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine” is quite interesting in the present tense because it implies some discontent with her current position. The narrator/autobiographer is certainly doing more “than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex” in writing a story that will expose this discontent and even do something about it.

At Lowood Jane has regained her voice, and it is strong as she begins her time at Thornfield, but this self-assertive voicing is only temporary. Her timid voice, though strengthened, will be no match for Rochester’s. In the Thornfield section of the novel Jane falls in love, and she must learn to deal with the effect of love on her vocal development. Jane will be tempted to allow her love to overpower her sense of self and independent voice, but a realization that her relationship with Rochester is based on false confidence allows her to extricate herself from Rochester’s control and escape Thornfield. Before Rochester arrives, Jane probes Mrs. Fairfax for information and freely expresses her desire to exercise her faculties and find action (91-96). Ironically, when Jane first meets Rochester she stands up to him. He is at that time a stranger who has no relationship to her. After his accident she tells him that she will not leave him alone and insists on helping him. But the longer they are together, the more Rochester’s personality and voice overpowers her own. In this section of the novel, Jane’s subdued voice leads directly to her subservient relationship with Rochester. Her silence deepens until Jane loses her vocal power

completely, along with her own identity, as her voice and self are subsumed by Rochester. Only the discovery of Bertha and the realization that Rochester has not confided in her gives Jane the strength to voice herself again, and this betrayal instigates her flight from Thornfield.

In their first meeting, Jane is both vocal and assertive. But her vocal boldness begins to fade as soon as she learns Rochester's identity. Even before meeting Rochester again, Jane's attitude foreshadows her subsidence into silence. Jane (internally focalizing) says of Thornfield after Rochester's return: "a rill from the outer world was flowing through it; it had a master: for my part I liked it better" (103). Thornfield, the dull lifeless hall, seems to come alive with Rochester's return, offering Jane the chance for an intimate, intellectual human relationship not possible with Thornfield's other residents. But in order to have this relationship, Jane immediately assumes a submissive role and quiets her narrative voice.³⁴ She has been taught well and remembers to be silent because Rochester expects her to. She is always conscious of the class difference between Rochester and herself and is also desirous of acting in accordance with the expectations of someone in her position. For example, Jane refers to herself as a "dependant" of Rochester's from the first mention of his name (88).

Jane's deliberately subdued narrative voice directly results in Rochester's growing control over her. Jane allows Rochester to gain this control because they are forming an intimate connection. For Jane, even an unequal companionship is better

³⁴ Sternlieb believes that Jane is silent for other, more calculating reasons. Sternlieb presents Jane as a cunning, manipulative person who uses her silence to gather information (455).

than none at all. Her previous two companions, Miss Temple and Helen, both held some amount of control over her, and their voices certainly dominated hers. But Jane was able to form a friendship with them, and she seeks a similar relationship with Rochester. In their first conversation, Rochester orders her to speak. Jane's refusal to comply with his command can be interpreted in one of two ways. First, it is possible that Jane resents being ordered to speak and resists this order by not complying; but Jane does comply with other orders, such as bringing her pictures for inspection and playing the piano. Second, it is possible that Jane is not comfortable having more than a superficial conversation with a superior. The following conversation establishes the pattern of their early relationship:

'Speak,' he urged.

'What about, sir?'

'Whatever you like. I leave both the choice of subject and the manner of treating it entirely to yourself.'

Accordingly I sat and said nothing: 'If he expects me to talk for the mere sake of talking and showing off, he will find he has addressed himself to the wrong person,' I thought.

'You are dumb, Miss Eyre.'

I was dumb still. (117)

At this crucial moment when they are establishing their relationship, Jane chooses not to speak to Rochester. Jane's internally focalized explanation of this action is that she realizes that Rochester is not actually interested in what she has to say—he is merely

looking for entertainment—and Jane refuses to use her voice in this manner. This explanation could demonstrate a respect for her own voice on Jane's part, as well as an implicit understanding of the politics of speaking and keeping silent. But I believe that Jane does herself a serious disservice by not speaking out at the beginning of their relationship, and that Brontë calls the reader's attention to this choice as a misguided one. Either way, Jane is content to let Mr. Rochester control their conversations. Rochester claims that he is looking for a person with whom he can converse. Instead of offering herself as a conversing companion, Jane offers herself as a silent confidant. This establishes an unequal relationship from its beginning. Jane's predicament here is that she begins the relationship as a dependant and ends the relationship in this section as a potential spouse. Jane emphasizes her position as dependant in this early conversation, clearly indicating that she is measuring her answers, at least in part, based on her expected role and responses (118). The role of confidant works well for a dependant seeking to please her master, but Jane is not able to break out of this vocal role after their relationship changes. She is only able to break free from this role after Rochester proves that he has been a false confidant.

Rochester instigates the roles of confider and confidant in order to narrate to Jane his own story (or at least what he wishes to tell of his story). He says to Jane,

‘Do you wonder that I avow this to you? Know, that in the course of your future life you will often find yourself elected the involuntary confidant of your acquaintances' secrets: people will instinctively find out, as I have done, that it is not your forte to tell of

yourself, but to listen while others talk of themselves; they will feel, too, that you listen with no malevolent scorn of their indiscretion, but with a kind of innate sympathy; not the less comforting and encouraging because it is very unobtrusive in its manifestations.’

‘How do you know?—how can you guess all this, sir?’

‘I know it well; therefore I proceed almost as freely as if I were writing my thoughts in a diary.’ (119)

Rochester has placed Jane in the role of listener and trustworthy confidant. As Sternlieb points out, Rochester has no real basis for making these assumptions; and they are proven wrong because Jane ultimately betrays this confidence by confiding the entire story to the reader (455). Jane herself recognizes Rochester’s misguided supposition and asks him how he can *guess*, hinting that his assumptions may not be correct. Rochester responds to Jane’s questioning of his declaration by reasserting his knowledge. He again claims that he *knows* Jane’s character. Though Jane labels Rochester’s assumptions as a guess, she allows him to cast her in the role of silent confidant. It is this silent acquiescence that exposes Jane to Rochester’s deceitful abuse because his confidence is, indeed false.

This reticence on Jane’s part encourages Rochester’s assumption that she is a “listener” and is a safe haven for his secrets. This situation is not a huge problem for Jane while their relationship is forming, since she revels in the role of Rochester’s confidant, believes Rochester to be sharing the most intimate parts of himself, and

later believes their relationship and her love to be founded on this intimacy. After hearing Rochester's tale about Adele's mother Jane comments,

The confidence he had thought fit to repose in me seemed a tribute to my discretion. I regarded and accepted it as such

I, indeed, talked comparatively little; but I heard him talk with relish. It was his nature to be communicative. . . . I felt at times as if her were my relation, rather than my master: yet he was imperious sometimes still; but I did not mind that; I saw it was his way. So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred. (128-29)

In these internally focalized lines Jane reveals her willingness to let Rochester's voice dominate her own in the interest of kinship. Jane views this relationship as resulting from, and evidenced by, his willingness to confide in her. She does not realize that Rochester is not confiding his most important secrets, nor does Jane care that Rochester is not interested in hearing her life story. Once again Jane's desire for a relationship, for a kindred spirit if not actual kin, has led her to suppress her own voice and identity in order to interact with someone else's. Further evidence that Jane believes that being a confidant who listens rather than one who confides is demonstrated in her comments about Blanche Ingram's failure to win Rochester's love. Jane comments, "It seems to me that she might, by merely sitting quietly at his side, saying little and looking less, get nigher to his heart" (164). Jane's willingness to serve Rochester without question and her conflation of service and friendship are

again demonstrated when he calls on her to dress Mason's wounds without explaining Mason's visit or the threat he poses. After tending to Mason's wounds, Rochester asks Jane, "You are my little friend, are you not?" to which Jane replies, "I like to serve you sir, and to obey you in all that is right." (191). Rochester's proffered friendship is couched in a requirement that Jane serve without asking, and Jane's acceptance recognizes and acquiesces to Rochester's terms of friendship.

Jane's first act of speaking out to Rochester occurs just before his proposal, when he is goading her with the suggestion of an imminent marriage to Blanche. Like the episode of childhood rage at Gateshead, Jane's emotions get the best of her and force her to assert herself verbally. Jane, externally focalizing, states,

The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway; and asserting a right to predominate: to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last; yes,—and to speak. (221)

This outburst of emotion gives Jane the power to reject Rochester's cruelly proposed torture of residing in a home ruled by a Mrs. Rochester other than herself.

Rosemarie Bodenheimer says of Jane's speech during this scene, "It is a rehearsal in miniature for her later actual leaving, after another fervent moment of speaking her mind releases her to do what she knows to be necessary for the preservation of her integrity"; Bodenheimer further links impassioned speech with liberation from social ties in the novel (393). While I agree that this scene is a rehearsal for Jane's leaving because it allows Jane the opportunity to speak out against Rochester, there is an

important distinction between this scene and the scene when Jane actually leaves Thornfield. This vocalization is strong and powerful, but Rochester is still in control of the conversation. Just as he has reserved knowledge of his wife from Jane's confidence, he toys with her emotions here—baiting her into verbal redress—only to turn the tables on her again by proposing to her.

After Jane accepts the proposal, Rochester continues to show disregard for Jane's voice. He asks her what she wants, even if it is half of his estate, and she replies, “. . . I would much rather have all your confidence. You will not exclude me from your confidence, if you admit me to your heart?” (230). Rochester's confidence is what Jane wants, and his confidence is exactly what Jane does not get. When she discovers that Rochester in fact hid more than he related, she is crushed. The true danger for Jane if she becomes Mrs. Rochester is not bigamy but a complete loss of her own voice and, subsequently, her identity.

Jane's vocal submission deepens after the engagement, since Rochester ignores Jane's voice and proceeds to try to buy her things that she does not want and dress her like a kept woman. He tells her, “I mean shortly to claim you—your thoughts, *conversation*, and company—for life” (234, my emphasis). Jane is uncomfortable with the position Rochester is putting her in, but only Jane the external focalizer seems to realize that Rochester is taking over her self. She states,

often I would rather have pleased than teased him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of

religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol (241).

Jane is even losing her desire and capacity to tease Rochester, which is the only way she combats Rochester with her own voice. Jane realizes that taking the wedding vows will completely erase Jane Eyre, and she refuses to affix her luggage tags with her married name because “Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist; she would not be born till to-morrow” (242). But this resistance is only done in the privacy of her room. When facing Rochester, Jane does not assert her voice vocally enough to convince Rochester that he is making her unhappy. Even with this realization, Jane seems resigned to giving up Jane Eyre in order to become Jane Rochester because marriage will finally give her what she most wants: a family of her own and someone to love who will love her in return.

The act that awakens Jane (and her dormant voice) is the realization that Rochester has not confided in her and that he wants to possess her regardless of circumstance or her desires. When Jane is forced to find her voice and speak against Rochester’s plans to marry her despite the existence of his wife or to keep her as his mistress, he still does not want to listen. He continues to plan, thinking that he can convince her. Rochester is, in part, justified in this belief because Jane has been almost completely submissive and has acquiesced to his previous desires. When Rochester explains his marital situation and his rationalizations of why it is acceptable for Jane to stay with him and asks her to pledge her fidelity to him, he wants her to

voice a validation of his justifications for the legitimacy of their relationship. Jane responds with strategic silence. When he asks again for her to promise to be his, she finally finds her voice and replies, “Mr. Rochester, I will *not* be yours” (278). Even after this emphatic statement, Rochester does not believe Jane and continues to question her voice.

Ironically, at this point of Jane’s self-assertion, Rochester begins to refer to her in the third person. This shows his inability to deal with Jane as a rational, independent person. He says,

‘never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable. A mere reed she feels in my hand! (And he shook me with the force of his hold.) ‘I could bend her with my finger and thumb: and what good would it do if I bent, if I up Tore, if I crushed her? Oh! come, Jane, come!’ (280)

To which Jane replies, “I am going, sir” (280). When Jane asserts her own voice, she recovers her self from Rochester, as reflected in his shift to the third person.

Rochester cannot comprehend a Jane who defies him and whom he cannot bend to his will. At this point Rochester realizes he is not going to be able to control Jane’s actions, and Jane reinforces her voice with action by leaving Thornfield.

Jane escapes Rochester’s narrative domination, but she is afraid to continue to narrate her self, so she creates an alternative self by naming herself Jane Elliot. When she first arrives at Moor House, Jane is able to speak for herself, and to stand up to St. John Rivers. At one point, St. John says to Jane, ““But I apprised you that I was a hard man, . . . difficult to persuade”” to which she responds, ““And I am a hard

woman,—impossible to be put off.” (338). But as soon as St. John reveals that he is her cousin, her resistance fades. Jane desperately wants a family, and her desire for familial ties leads her to subsume her voice and identity once again in a quest for social acceptance.

Jane’s efforts to please St. John gradually overpower her voice, and she again chooses silence for the sake of maintaining a relationship. She begins to study his chosen language and allows him to push her without daring to complain. She says, “I daily wished more to please him: but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties (351).” St. John gradually subsumes her voice. Even the revelation of Jane’s true identity—that she is Jane Eyre, not Jane Elliot—is voiced by St. John, not Jane. He says,

half an hour ago, . . . I spoke of my impatience to hear the sequel of a tale; on reflection, I find the matter will be better managed by my assuming the narrator’s part, and converting you into a listener. (334)

This remarkable line overtly states that St. John is deliberate in denying Jane the ability of voicing her own story and, in order to manage her better, that he will seize the authority to narrate her story for her.³⁵ Like Rochester, St. John takes away Jane’s ability to act and think for herself when he takes away her voice. It is ironic that one of St. John’s controlling acts is to force Jane to change the language she is studying from German to Hindostanee. It is as if he literally wants to control the words that

³⁵ Janet Freeman’s essay discusses each of the episodes in the novel where another character narrates Jane’s story, or where she (the character) narrates her own story. See specifically pages 684 and 697 for two brief references to this episode.

come out of her mouth. St. John has decided that Jane is the perfect help-mate for his missionary plans and determines that she must come with him, even though they both realize that Jane's frail health will not allow her to live long in the tropical climate. The externally focalized narrator realizes her blindness. She states, "he prolonged still further my lessons in Hindostanee, and grew more urgent in requiring their accomplishment: and I, like a fool, never thought of resisting him—I could not resist him" (352).

St. John is also in control of Jane's professional life. Jane asks him for a job, and he allows her to teach the school for poor girls that he opens in town. Although the position includes lodging and she is in control of the classroom, the students are uneducated and St. John retains ultimate control over the establishment. She says of the time there:

Was I very gleeful, settled, content, during the hours I passed in yonder bare, humble school-room this morning and afternoon? Not to deceive myself, I must reply—No: I felt desolate to a degree. I felt—yes, idiot that I am—I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence. . . . But let me not hate and despise myself too much for these feelings: I know them to be wrong—that is a great step gained; I shall strive to overcome them.

(316)

In this odd narrative moment, Jane internally focalizes in the present tense. This is not the retrospective narrator interrupting in a present-tense metalepsis, but a present

tense account from the internal character. This shift into the present by the internal character allows the narrator to make a statement about her negative feelings towards her position with the promise of better feelings about the position without having to make a direct statement about whether she actually changes those feelings. Although she does come to feel some regard for some of her pupils, she is never happy and continues to feel that the job is beneath her and a decline in social standing. St. John thinks that she should be content with spending her time doing those in need such a service, but she tells him “I could not go on for ever so: I want to enjoy my own faculties as well as to cultivate those of other people” (343). St. John’s school house does not allow her to enjoy her own faculties. It does not function as the school houses in the other novels do for the female protagonists. She escapes his professional control over her as the mistress of his school, but he attempts to ensnare her in a deeper professional and personal commitment by asking her to become a missionary and his wife.

Jane becomes unable to resist St. John’s domineering personality because she craves acceptance and familial love, and also because his absolutist moral vision creates its own potent spell. In addition to St. John’s familial ties, he also offers Jane an equally tempting motivation for marriage: a holy vision of duty and missionary service to God. Jane is strongly attracted to St. John’s magnetic description of his vision of service because his didactic voice draws her from her own identity. Indeed, she recognizes the power St. John’s voice has over her and fears it. Just before his proposal, Jane, internally focalizing, says, “I trembled to hear some fatal word

spoken which would at once declare and rivet the spell” (354). St. John’s vision temporarily entrances her. When he asks what her heart is saying about God’s plan for her, she replies “My heart is mute,—my heart is mute”, and St. John replies, “Then I must speak for it” (354). Jane has been drawn in by St. John’s personal magnetism and moral absolutism, but her voice has been strengthened by her previous encounters and she continues to refuse him. Despite her claim to the contrary, her heart does not remain mute. Jane refuses to give herself to St. John primarily because she knows he does not love her, nor does she love him. Ironically, by speaking of her own heart she is able to break away from St. John long enough to begin to understand his character. When she retorts to him, “I will give my heart to God, . . . *You* do not want it” she realizes that he is just a fallible human rather than a divinely inspired moral authority. Jane comments, “I felt his imperfection and took courage. I was with an equal—one with whom I might argue—one with whom, if I saw good, I might resist” (358).

Hearing Rochester’s voice reminds Jane of the bond that she shared with him and convinces her that she must be certain there is no chance of romantic happiness before deciding to enter a loveless marriage. The voice helps Jane realize that she does not share St. John’s rigid moral vision or his call to service in the mission field. Her calling (as we see in the last chapters of the book) lies in love and family and in a compassionate moral stance. At first Jane attributes the supernatural voice she hears to nature and says,

I broke from St. John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play, and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must, and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. (370)

The emotional upheaval of hearing Rochester's voice gives Jane the vocal power to command St. John and regain control of her self. Jane has also reconnected with her own moral vision, and is able to "[pray] in [her] way—a different way to St. John's, but effective in its own fashion", and is finally able to accept her own voice as a reliable moral authority (370). By understanding the urges of her own heart, listening to her inner voice, and voicing herself to St. John, Jane learns not to subsume her own self identity for the sake of a relationship. She finally gains the knowledge to answer the question posited at the beginning of the novel: "*Speak* I must: I had been trodden on severely, and *must* turn: but how?"—by commanding her own voice with energy and conviction. This realization instigates the final shift in the novel, Jane's return to Thornfield and subsequent marriage to Mr. Rochester at Ferndean, but this Mrs. Rochester is no stranger to Jane Eyre. Jane is the person in control of the relationship, and it is her compassionate voice that is authoritative.

At Ferndean Jane finds Rochester and uses her strengthened voice to instigate a new relationship with him, one based on Jane's voice. The novel opens with Jane trapped inside on a rainy day, not able to take a walk and only able to escape her confinement by reading. By the end of the novel this picture of passivity has altered

dramatically. Jane's approach to Ferndean also occurs on a cold, rainy day, but she is no longer passive. Indeed, she dismisses the coach for which she has paid a double fare, and walks the last mile in the rain on a road said to be overgrown by nothing more than grass. There is no indication that the carriage could not have driven all the way to the manor house. Brontë wants to emphasize Jane's activity. She is no longer restricted by anyone's rules. Even nature herself has not beaten her. Jane must be saved from the rain when she is found at Moor House, but here she is the person who has come to be the savior.

Jane's interaction with Rochester prior to their marriage is a reversal of their interaction at Thornfield. At Thornfield it is Rochester who is withholding confidence while claiming divulgement; at Ferndean it is Jane who withholds confidence. But there are crucial distinctions between Rochester's deceit and Jane's discretion. While Rochester forms a relationship with Jane based on a false sense of confidence, Jane rekindles the relationship with open reticence, making Rochester crave her confidence. Where Rochester once assumed that Jane had no story to tell, no experience that qualified her to converse with him, he now begs to hear her experiences. Rochester, the master storyteller of Thornfield, never even relates the narrative of his crippling—that right is given to an unnamed innkeeper. Jane is now a just and compassionate narrator, demonstrating her mastery over the art by using her story to pull Rochester out of his self-pity. She eventually reveals her courtship by St. John, thereby using jealousy to allow her romantic relationship with Rochester to resume, but Jane chooses not to disclose all of her confidence. She decides not to tell

Rochester about hearing his voice, deciding it would be detrimental for him to hear the story because his mind “needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural,” and she wants him to focus on their relationship (394).

By the novel’s end, Jane has managed to overcome her willingness to place relationships over her own self-narrated voice. When she arrives at Ferndean, she has complete control of her voice, which has been strengthened by her experiences at Moor House, and she returns to Rochester with a voice that is stronger than his ever was because it is tempered by her ordeal with St. John. Jane establishes her voice in the relationship from their first reunion. Rochester, who cannot see, recognizes Jane by her voice, but does not believe she is present until he can feel her. Yet Jane reemphasizes her voice along with her heart, connecting the two.³⁶ When Rochester validates that her body is present, Jane tells Rochester and the reader, “‘And this is her voice,’ I added. ‘She is all here: her heart, too’” (382). Jane indicates here that she has returned, not as the voiceless subordinate that he almost married, but as a vocal woman who knows her own mind and heart. In a reversal of the first proposal scene, it is Jane who evokes the proposal and Rochester who gropes in the dark, not believing what he hears.³⁷ Like Rochester’s use of Blanche, Jane uses St. John to inspire Rochester’s jealousy and draw him out of his self-pitying depression. Jane is demonstrating that she has learned and perfected Rochester’s art of storytelling. But her mastery of her voice does not imply that she is going to use her voice to oppress,

³⁶ Freeman also points to Jane’s emphasis on her voice in this first meeting, but does not connect the voicing with Jane’s heart. See Freeman p. 698.

³⁷ Jane actually uses the word proposal, and works to elicit a proposal from him. Rochester’s speech in this episode is much like Jane’s erratic speech during the first proposal, and Jane’s manipulations are unquestionably similar to those employed by Rochester.

mislead, and dominate him as others have oppressed her. Jane's mastery is tempered with love and justice, and a desire to cultivate a healthy relationship. She uses her storytelling techniques and her loving kindness to draw Rochester back into a productive relationship. Jane's voice dominates Rochester's because this dominance on her part is necessary to help reestablish the balance of power, and for Brontë to demonstrate that Jane will not use her verbal superiority as a tool of oppression.

Many critics have discussed the reason for Rochester's blindness, but none offers the explanation that I posit: that Brontë chooses for Rochester to be blinded so that he will not only recognize, but depend on, Jane's voice.³⁸ Where Rochester once dismisses Jane as a listener, at the end of the novel he calls out constantly to Jane. She says, "If a moment's silence broke the conversation, he would turn restless, touch me, then say, 'Jane'" (385). Jane reanimates Rochester with her voice. He is "like a lamp quenched" until Jane speaks to him and "[wakens] the glow" (387). Jane's voice now literally controls Rochester's worldview because Jane speaks what Rochester cannot see, and he thrives on her voice and its power. He tells Jane,

All the melody of the earth is concentrated in my Jane's tongue to my ear (I am glad it is not naturally a silent one) all the sunshine I can feel is in her presence. (387)

Rochester now recognizes that Jane is not naturally silent. This realization is absolutely necessary for the development of their relationship. It is now Rochester who craves Jane's confidence, and her voice alone can give him comfort.

³⁸ See Sternlieb, pages 465, 474-475 for an alternative discussion of the reason for Rochester's blindness.

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë creates a protagonist who must overcome dependency and a submissive nature to discover vocal empowerment. This empowerment comes as a result of painful realizations and betrayed confidences. Brontë creates an autobiographical, retrospective narrator who encounters increasingly more dominant voices in her search for intimate companionship. Each encounter forces Jane to strengthen her own voice and perfect her storytelling technique. Brontë arranges the novel around episodes of voicing. The major shifts in the novel come after Jane is forced to rediscover her voice. At Gateshead her leaving is a direct result of her voicing her ill treatment to Mrs. Reed. At Lowood she breaks eight years of silence and voices herself in an advertisement in an attempt to broaden her horizons. At Thornfield Jane reclaims her voice and denies Rochester's request to be his mistress. At Moor House she fights within herself, but finally voices her opposition to St. John's plans for her. And it is her voice that Rochester constantly calls out for after their reunion. Jane ultimately realizes that she must not be afraid to speak and that her voice, if used with enough conviction, can command even a person as insistent as St. John Rivers. The novel ends with Jane voicing the current situations of the other major characters, demonstrating that she is not only in charge of her own narrative, she is also in charge of everyone else's.

Jane ends her autobiography with a chapter labeled "conclusion", so I will conclude by discussing her conclusion and asking this question: What are the implications of ending an autobiographic account of a living person with a labeled conclusion? How can a life that is not over have a conclusion, and is a conclusion

ever an appropriate ending for a life, since “conclusion” implies the ending of a story or the summation of a scholarly work? By labeling the last chapter of the novel a conclusion, Brontë is pointing to the constructed nature of this story. Jane has constructed and told her story, always mindful of the reader, to whom this conclusion is addressed. She says in the conclusion,

My tale draws to its close: one word respecting my experience of married life, and one brief glance at the fortunes of those whose names have most frequently recurred in this narrative, and I have done. (396)

Jane labels her autobiography a “tale” and points to her very obvious tying up of loose ends that must accompany any well-told story. This conclusion is most fitting, since it delineates the convergence of Jane’s lessons in voice and narration. Just as Jane passes a span of eight years without comment while at Lowood, claiming that she is “only bound to invoke memory where [she knows her] responses will possess some degree of interest” (72), so Jane passes a span of ten years of marriage with only a few pages in a concluding chapter. It is entirely appropriate for this tale to end with a brief summary of the life Jane has worked so hard to obtain, because the true story of *Jane Eyre* lies not in the romantic fulfillment of marriage, but in the process by which Jane forged her own voice and reclaimed her self from her oppressors. This is why this story must be a retrospective narration, and why it is the story of *Jane Eyre* and not *Jane Rochester* (or even Currer Bell, the editor rather than author).

But it is also important that Jane does not end the narrative with her own story. By summarizing the lives of other characters in her tale, Jane is emphasizing

her understanding of her need to intermingle her independent voice with social relationships. Brontë is emphasizing the importance of balancing a personal voice and self with a social one. By ending her autobiography narrating the story of others, Jane establishes that she has full authorial control over her acquaintances by narrating their lives, which is a strong illustration of Jane's vocal empowerment. This ending, addressed to the reader, also emphasizes that Jane's narration has not only been a story of learning how to speak, but also how to speak and still remain part of a social group.

Jane is also demonstrating that she has mastered the art of narration. Jane has learned when and how to tell her story, and does so with amazing eloquence and complexity. Her domestication is not a tempering of her female power, as other critics have argued.³⁹ Rather, it is the successful culmination of Jane's two basic urges: the desire to have a strong, credible, independent voice; and the desire to find a social niche that allows for human companionship without subordination. In order for this culmination of voice and social position to occur, Jane must cultivate her voice and develop her own narration until *she* is the master storyteller, with more narrative skill than the novel's other characters. Jane the internal focalizer learns the art of narration by listening to and reacting against the storytelling of other characters, and Jane the retrospective narrator demonstrates her mastery of the art by writing the

³⁹ See the following critics for arguments that the novel's end is a domestication that removes Jane's feminine power: Steven Cohan and Linda Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 147; David Rosenwasser, "A Kristevan Reading of the Marriage Plot in *Jane Eyre*," in *Approaches to Teaching Brontë's "Jane Eyre,"* Ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Beth Lau. (MLAA, 1993), pp. 154-61; Louise Penner, "Domesticity and Self-Possession in *The Morgesons* and *Jane Eyre*," *Studies in American Fiction* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University, 1999) 27:2, pp. 131-148.

novel. Therefore, Brontë creates in Jane an independent female voice that insists on her own autonomy. Jane's self-determination is made most obvious in the ending, where Brontë allows her to have social relationships, and even a husband, while retaining self-identity and self-mastery. Jane has autonomy that is difficult, if not impossible for nineteenth-century women to achieve. By marking Jane's tale an "autobiography," Brontë insists on the plausibility of a vocally dominant woman who is not ostracized from social interaction, while simultaneously demonstrating the many oppressors of the female voice by showcasing Jane's struggle to gain vocal and narrative independence. The autobiographic narrative is also a public narration, a publishable (and, in this case, published) form intended to be shared that marks the narrator as a professional writer. Writing is a career that offers Jane full professional autonomy—especially because Rochester cannot even read her book—as well as the opportunity to "enjoy [her] own faculties as well as to cultivate those of other people" as she tells St. John she wants out of an occupation (343). Her faculties are fully exercised in the narrating of her story, and other people, especially women, can learn from Jane's personal lessons in vocal empowerment how to become empowered themselves.

CHAPTER THREE

“Quite a woman and something more”:
The Dual Focalizers of *Shirley*

Fathers! . . . You would wish to be proud of your daughters and not blush for them-- then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manœvrer, the mischief-making talebearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered—they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you: cultivate them—give them scope and work—they will be your gayest companions in health; your tenderest nurses in sickness; your most faithful prop in age.
(378)

Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, published in 1849, is a mixture of narrative forms. Although there are moments of first person narration, most of the novel is told in the third person, and is focalized primarily through the two female protagonists: Caroline and Shirley. This is Brontë's only third person novel. She shifted out of first person narration for *Shirley* because she wanted to contrast the lives and thoughts of Caroline and Shirley. Of primary importance in this contrast is the issue of profession. Set in 1811-12 amidst the Luddite rebellion, *Shirley*'s scope is more historical than Brontë's other novels. The novel opens with a mob scene where mill workers destroy new equipment that they fear will replace them. They are fighting for their jobs, their only means of financial support. And, of course, they are all men. While the Luddite uprising continues to haunt the text, the focus of the novel is not on these mill workers, it is on the mill owner and manager, and, more importantly and surprisingly, on women's right to work.

Female professionalization is at the heart of *Shirley*, which contrasts two women:

Shirley, who has inherited an estate and businesses which she runs as a man, and Caroline, who wishes for a profession “fifty times a day” (235), but is stuck in middle

class inactivity due to her gender. Their status as single women also complicates the issue of professionalization. If Shirley marries, she must lose some, if not all, professional control of her estate, and all legal control. Caroline, a dependent ward with no dowry, does not see herself as marketable as a wife, and without a profession faces an uncertain future as an old maid dependent upon the kindness of friends. Both women represent aspects of the struggle between professionalization and relationships, so Brontë chose to create a third person narrator who focalizes through both women. The question of professionalization and womanhood is at the heart of this text.

Brontë has moved the issue of female professionalization into the forefront of the novel, but there is no easy solution. When Shirley is conducting business, she refers to herself using masculine pronouns and calls herself Captain, and at all other times she refers to herself as a woman.⁴⁰ Shirley is not an argument for androgyny; she is not both genders at once, so I am referring to her as being dual gendered because she assumes different gender roles depending on circumstance. Caroline, a dependent middle class woman, has no entrance into the professional world. In *Shirley*, professional power is directly related to gender and relationships, and Shirley resists sharing her power with a man. Both Shirley and Caroline marry, but Shirley—who has a great deal of professional power—hesitates to share this power and resists marriage before ultimately acceding and sharing her professional power with her

⁴⁰ As I will discuss in the conclusion, Charlotte Brontë also referred to herself with masculine pronouns when discussing business, even after her identity is well-known and when corresponding with her publishers, who had met her in person.

husband. But she joins Caroline in a project outside the scope of her shared duties: she and Caroline start a day school together.

Shirley was published in 1849, originally in three volumes, and is set in Yorkshire in 1811-12 during a time of social upheaval. The novel begins by recounting the breaking of frames for Robert Moore's mill by workers afraid of being replaced by machinery. The social unrest revolving around the lack of work haunts the novel, and is extended by Caroline's lack of work. Robert Moore operates a mill owned by Shirley Keeldar, who is an only child and has inherited the mill and an estate. She does not enter the community until the end of the first volume. Caroline Helstone is Robert's distant, non-blood related cousin, and is the adult ward of her uncle, who is the Rector of Briarfield. Later in the novel it is revealed that Mrs. Pryor, Shirley's paid companion, is Caroline's mother. Caroline is in love with Robert Moore, who shares her feelings, but since Caroline has no income or dowry and Robert's mill is not doing well, there is no chance of their marrying at the beginning of the novel. By the end of the novel, Robert and Caroline do marry. Shirley's love interest, Robert's brother Louis Moore, does not appear until volume three. He is a tutor to Shirley's nephew, and though Shirley agrees to marry him, she postpones the act as long as possible. When the novel ends, Shirley is sharing duties as mill and property owner with Louis, and Shirley and Caroline are planning to open a day school.

Many scholars discount *Shirley* as a lesser novel than *Jane Eyre* or *Villette* on narrative grounds.⁴¹ While it is true that the reader does not come to know and bond with Caroline or Shirley the way they do Jane or Lucy, *Shirley* is concerned with contrasting the stories of two women, and a first person narrative would not have allowed equal access to both women's thoughts. One critic who does attempt to reveal *Shirley's* narrative complexity is Elizabeth Langland. In "Dialogic Plots and Chameleon Narrators in the Novels of Victorian Women Writers: The Example of Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*," Langland discusses the dual voiced nature of the novel, seeing the novel as exploring a dialogic tension between realism and romance. She argues that

in women's texts, . . . there are dual strong voices which complicate the construction of significance and demonstrate the slipperiness of interpretive process. . . . We must illuminate these different significances rather than read them as formal failures. . . . We must preserve the dialogic imagination that accepts this dialectical tension as resolution. . . . Brontë has first presented the terms *romance* and *reality* as they exist in patriarchy, then deconstructed them in order to suggest an alternative feminist or humanist reality, and finally represented the patriarchal and feminist realities in tension, refusing assimilation, each interrogating the ultimate significance of the other. (25-26)

I agree with Langland's dialogic reading of the text, but want to add to the discussion that there is another duality at work in the form of third person narration with dual

⁴¹G.H. Lewes said that "all unity, in consequence of defective art, is wanting" (217); Gilbert and Gubar claim that in having Shirley marry Louis, Brontë "capitulates to convention." (394)

focalizers. In focalizing through both women, the narration allows the reader direct access to each woman's thoughts and feelings, enabling the reader to contrast the women's social and professional positions, as well as their united positions as women in a patriarchal world. It is only through the juxtaposition of these two women's professional situations that the full discussion of gender and professionalization in the novel is revealed.

Often the focalized passages are clearly marked by the narrator, either by using single quotation marks denoting that the words are the character's direct thoughts, or by following a focalized passage with a statement like "What I have just said are Caroline's ideas of the pair: she felt what has just been described" (254). The epigraph at the beginning of the chapter is from a long diatribe that we hear Caroline think. These interior monologues frequently do much more than present characters' thoughts necessary for plot development. Sometimes, as in Caroline's call to fathers to let their daughters work, they read as direct pleas with the reader.

Shirley, an only child, has inherited Fieldhead, her family's estate, which includes a mill. She is in a rare position of power for a nineteenth-century woman. But her ability to serve as the professional head of her estate is limited by her gender. When Shirley is conducting business, she refers to herself using masculine pronouns and calls herself Captain, while at all other times she refers to herself as a woman.

Although the name Shirley is a common female name today, when written Shirley was a man's name, as the narrator is careful to note, "Shirley Keeldar (she had no Christian name but Shirley: her parents, who had wished to have a son, finding that,

after eight years of marriage, Providence had granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy” (211). Although Shirley is clearly marked in this early passage as having a masculine name, and as carrying the family responsibilities normally transferred to sons, she is also carefully marked as feminine. She enters the room holding flowers, is described as being agreeable to the eye and having a “height and shape” like Caroline’s (who is described as attractive), and proceeds to make nosegays (small bouquets) for her visitors while discussing her work as if she were a man.

Shirley refers to her masculine self as “Captain” among other masculine titles, and says of herself,

“Business! Really the word makes me conscious I am indeed no longer a girl, but quite a woman and something more. I am an esquire: Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man’s name; I hold a man’s position; it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood You must choose me for your churchwarden, Mr. Helstone, the next time you elect new ones: they ought to make me a magistrate and a captain of yeomanry: Tony Lumpkin’s mother was a colonel, and his aunt a justice of the peace—why shouldn’t I be?”⁴²

(213)

⁴² Shirley’s reference to Tony Lumpkin’s relatives in Oliver Goldsmith’s comedic play, *She Stoops to Conquer*, as authoritative can be seen as both a tongue-in-cheek joke and as a legitimation of the ability of literature to redefine possibilities.

This statement that she is “quite a woman and something more” is simultaneously playful and serious. She is posing her argument in a playful way, but she is in reality holding a man’s position and in possession of a man’s name and she wants that authority to be recognized and treated with respect. She is asking for a place of authority in the community befitting her inheritance, and sees this authority as both her right and her duty. When she feels guilty about the loss of work brought about by the looms, she tells Caroline, “my conscience is quite uneasy, as if I had committed, or was going to commit, a crime. It is not my *private* conscience, you must understand, but my landed-proprietor and lord-of-the-manor conscience” (267). Here again, her landed-proprietor, masculine self and conscience is separate from her personal self.

The men of the novel have different reactions to Shirley’s dual-gendered persona. Mr. Helstone, the Rector and Caroline’s uncle and guardian, refers to Shirley as Captain and uses masculine pronouns to refer to her when discussing business, but often in a playful, mocking way. In their first meeting, he tells Shirley’s companion Mrs. Pryor, “take care of this future magistrate, this churchwarden in perspective, this captain of yeomanry, this young squire of Briarfield, in a word: don’t let him exert himself too much: don’t let him break his neck in hunting: especially, let him mind how he rides down that dangerous hill near the hollow” (215). While his words echo the titles Shirley claims for herself as proper current or future titles, Mr. Helstone couples them with mocking about her ability to perform traditionally masculine tasks like hunting. Robert Moore, who operates the mill on Shirley’s land,

consults her on business matters. But neither of these men includes her in the planning or execution of their strategy to defend the mill from rioters. As a woman, she is completely excluded from these discussions. . . . When she realizes that they are excluding her from planning resistance to the impending riot, she tells Caroline, ““They won’t trust me, . . . that is always the way when it comes to the point”” (310).

Although she has no choice but to let the protection of the mill from rioters remain in control of the men, she refuses to allow their control at other times. When Shirley’s “landed-proprietor and lord-of-the-manor conscience” (268) prompts her to be more charitable to the area’s poor, the focalized narrator makes clear that the curates of the area “were to have no voice in the disposal of the money” and that “their meddling fingers were not to be inserted into the pie” (270). When she has the rectors meet to convince them to agree to her plan to help the poor, she tells the men, ““you must regard me as Captain Keeldar to-day. This is quite a gentleman’s affair—yours and mine entirely The ladies there are only to be our aids-de-camp, and at their peril they speak, till we have settled the whole business”” (273). Mr. Helstone’s response is to smile “a little grimly” and to consult “his brethren” only glancing at Shirley and the other women. Although she has to get the men to sanction her plan, she ultimately gets her way. Shirley watches over their shoulders with a “queer smile—a smile not ill-natured, but significant: too significant to be generally thought amiable” (273). The narrator says,

Men rarely like such of their fellows as read their inward nature too clearly and truly. It is good for women, especially to be endowed with

a soft blindness: to have mild, dim eyes that never penetrate below the surface of things—that take all for what it seems: thousands, knowing this, keep their eyelids drooped, on system; but the most downcast glance has its loophole, through which it can, on occasion, take its sentinel-survey of life. (273)

Rather than focalizing through Shirley, the narrator here gives his/her own presentation of the situation, observing Shirley's eyes rather than her thoughts. This allows for a more general warning about the false assumption that even downcast eyes cannot see inner nature.⁴³ The narrator says, "Captain Keeldar was complimented on his taste; the compliment charmed him: it had been his aim to gratify and satisfy his priestly guests: he had succeeded, and was radiant with glee" (274). Here, as in many other instances, Shirley is able to get her way, but Shirley is quite aware of the limits of her inclusion as a "man" of business. Shirley is frustrated by the limits of her professional power, and she resists giving any of it up, even to the man that she loves. She retains as much power and control as she is able to, even when she is married.

Shirley's love interest, Louis Moore (cousin to Caroline and brother to Robert), does not appear until the third volume (though she has five other offers of marriage, all of which she refuses). He is Shirley's nephew's tutor. Although it is obvious that Shirley and Louis have feelings for one another, Louis is in a socially inferior position

⁴³ The fact that it is the narrator's view rather than focalization is made more obvious by a rare use of "I" to discuss a particular, though unnamed, pair of blue eyes that belonged to a woman who was "the finest, deepest, subtlest schemer in Europe" (273-74).

and Shirley is not eager to take a husband and lose her authority. It is also clear through the narration focalized through Shirley that she does not consider many men strong enough to be her companion. Shirley tells Caroline early in their acquaintance that “Nothing ever charms me more than when I meet my superior—one who makes me sincerely feel that he is my superior” (226). This is an easy thing to say since Shirley never feels that anyone is her superior.

Louis takes the *role* of superior in order to convince Shirley to marry him. He even takes over the narration, as the section of the novel in which he proposes is presented from his journal. Before leaving Fairfield, he determines to discover Shirley’s feelings for him and forces her into a conversation about their eventual marriage partners. He demands that she tell her where his future wife is. He says of himself, “I suppose I hardly was like my usual self, for I scared her; that I could see: it was right: she must be scared to be won” (577). He does not propose his love to her until she responds to his statement of “My pupil” with “My master” (577). He calls her his leopardess, and himself her tamer. While she reminds him that a leopardess cannot be tamed, he replies, “Tame or fierce, wild or subdued, you are *mine*” (579). Shirley’s response is one of acquiescence: “I am glad I know my keeper, and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose” (279).

This acquiescence is not complete or permanent. Of her property and duties, Shirley tells Louis, “I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of the property; but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to sustain my

part well. . . . Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant: be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!" (580). She is not relinquishing all of her duties and authority to him, nor does she expect him to be guide or master (the traditional Christian role of a husband) all of the time. She asks him to redress her weaknesses. She also postpones the marriage itself as long as possible. In another entry in his "little black book," Louis comments, "To see her now, one would think she had never pressed her cheek to my shoulder, or clung to me with tenderness or trust. I feel unsafe: she renders me miserable. . . . Pantheress! She gnaws her chain: I see the white teeth working at the steel! She has dreams of her wild woods and pinings after virgin freedom". (584). Shirley manages to postpone the wedding from the winter of 1811 until August of 1812, when she and Caroline marry Louis and Robert in a double ceremony.⁴⁴ The narrator does not include a description by herself or Louis of how Shirley is finally convinced to stop postponing the marriage. The narrator only tells us,

It had needed a sort of tempest-shock to bring her to the point; but there she was at last, fettered to a fixed day: there she lay, conquered by love, and bound with a vow.

Thus vanquished and restricted, she pined, like any other chained denizen of deserts. Her captor alone could cheer her; his

⁴⁴ The description of the wedding is preceded by a "slight résumé of warlike facts" addressed by the narrator in first person to the men of the Manchester School, which includes Napoleon's storming of Russia, and Wellington's ascension to Generalissimo in Spain, and finally the end of blockaded ports on 18 June, 1812 (590-91). This last event makes the mill profitable again, and allows Robert to propose to Caroline.

society only could make amends for the lost privilege of liberty: in his absence, she sat or wandered alone; spoke little, and ate less. (592)

Although she loves Louis, it is difficult for her to accept the loss of autonomy necessitated by marriage. She finds pleasure in his company, but dreads the coming encumbrance.

Shirley also refuses to do any of the preparations for the marriage, leaving everything for Louis to direct. Weeks before the wedding, Louis becomes the master of Fieldhead, but his primary responsibility as such is to plan his own wedding, a task typically handled by the woman. The narrator says of Shirley, “She abdicated without a word or a struggle. ‘Go to Mr. Moore; ask Mr. Moore,’ was her answer when applied to for orders. Never was wooer of wealthy bride so thoroughly absolved from the subaltern part; so inevitably compelled to assume a paramount character” (592). This abdication is only temporary; Shirley makes the reason for the abjuration clear a year later. “‘Louis’, she said, ‘would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern: the incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier’” (592). Many feminist critics have disparaged Shirley’s marriage to Louis. Gilbert and Gubar claim that in doing so Brontë “capitulates to convention,” but I see her instead as dealing more realistically with both Caroline’s and Shirley’s dual desire for an occupation and for love. While it may be more laudable for our contemporary feminist sentiments to have Shirley reject Louis to retain her professional power, in reality the dismissal of love and family for professional power is not such an easy decision. Like Brontë’s other novels, the tension between

professional autonomy and romantic love has no resolution, only various kinds of compromises.

Unlike Shirley, Caroline, a dependent middle class woman, has no entrance into the professional world. Caroline longs for a profession for several reasons. First, she wants something active to do, some purpose for her life. Second, there are practical reasons for her desire for a profession. She is an adult ward of her uncle with no dowry and no expectation of marriage, and with no living relatives (except for the mother she learns about late in the novel). Her uncle's home is not a loving one, but it is all that she has. Without an occupation, she envisions a future as an old maid, dependant on the kindness of friends.

In the first conversation in which Caroline participates, her future husband Robert Moore asks her, "What life are you destined for, Caroline? What will you do with your French, drawing, and other accomplishments, when they are acquired?" to which she replies "As to the life I am destined for, I cannot tell. I suppose to keep my uncle's house till in short, till events offer other occupations for me" (98). She tells him that she is not satisfied with her life because she is making no money, and that "I should like an occupation; and if I were a boy, it would not be so difficult to find one" (98-99). The conflict between occupation and romance is the conflict that delays the fulfillment of Caroline and Robert's love plot for most of the novel. Robert is not in a secure financial position to take a wife, particularly one with no sizable income like Caroline. Caroline even suggests that she can help Robert solve this problem, saying "[if I were a boy] I could be apprenticed to your trade—the

cloth-trade: I could learn it of you, as we are distant relations . . . I know you greatly desire to be rich, in order to pay your fathers debts; perhaps I could help you to get rich” (99). The hypothetical discussion of possibilities if she were a boy shifts here to an offer to work and help in reality, even if she is a woman. She returns to this theme herself later. The narrator, focalizing through Caroline, says “she would wish 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” (104). Here again her desire for occupation is tangled with her desire to be with Robert. While it could be argued that the reason she wants to be a boy and have a profession here is merely to be close to Robert in any way that she can, the abundance of discussion of her desire for a profession in the novel indicates that it is much more than that.

Caroline longs for a profession as often and as passionately as she longs for Robert, but can have neither and resigns herself to becoming an old maid, which leads her to ask herself the question Robert posed to her earlier:

I have to live, perhaps, till seventy years. As far as I know, I have good health: half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between me and the grave? . . . What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world? . . . that is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve: other people solve it for them by saying ‘Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help

is wanted.” Is this enough [to only serve others]? Is it to live?

Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. (190)

This exclamation is followed by the only activity open to her: she walks herself to exhaustion every day “till she was literally faint” (200). She becomes so desperate that the narrator, focalizing through her, says, “at last the life she led reached the point when it seemed she could bear it no longer; that she must seek and find a change somehow, or her heart and head would fail under the pressure which strained them” (200). She feels that her lack of occupation and of hope is threatening her very life. She decides that she would like to seek a position as a governess since that is the only occupation open to her, but her uncle’s response to this suggestion is to ask if she is bewitched and to immediately tell her never to speak of it again. He cannot understand why any woman would want to work if she did not have to. The loss of hope for Robert’s love, coupled with her lack of gainful employment, leads to her wasting away before Shirley’s arrival.

Shirley, as a woman with professional power, cannot completely understand Caroline’s desperation. She perceives Caroline’s desires enough to ask her if she wants a profession, to which Caroline responds, “I wish it fifty times a-day. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts.” (235). In their discussion of female professions, Shirley wonders whether labor alone can make a human being happy. Caroline responds, “No; but it can give varieties of pain, and prevent us from breaking our hearts with a single tyrant master-torture. Besides, successful labour has its recompense; a vacant, weary, lonely

hopeless life has none” (235). Caroline envisions her future to be that of a dependent spinster with no purpose and no hope. Shirley’s reply, ““But hard labour and learned professions, they say, make women masculine, course, unwomanly”” (235) is interesting in light of her dual-gendered self presentation. The agency of this belief is placed on the unnamed “they,” the general social perception of women and their place. Shirley, as a woman already transgressing, must separate her professional self from her feminine self, for fear of what “they say”. The difference between them is not a monetary one as much as one of opportunity. The narrator says, “the heiress was rich—very rich—compared with her new friend: one possessed a clear thousand a-year—the other not a penny; and yet there was a safe sense of equality experienced in [Shirley’s] society, never known in that of the ordinary Briarfield and Whinbury gentry” (230). This equality is equality of mind and spirit, but not of opportunity. When Caroline mentions her desire to seek a position as a governess, Shirley’s response is ““Nonsense! . . . What an idea! Be a governess! Better be a slave at once. Where is the necessity of it? Why should you dream of such a painful step?”” (245). One of the few professional options open to educated middle and upper class women at the time was being a governess, but this position was not one of power. Governesses were in a subservient position in the household, and were often mistreated.⁴⁵ For Caroline, the possibility of any profession that will give her activity and save her from spinsterhood is better than the bleak future she sees for herself. For Shirley, who has a professional life, the idea of being subservient to others as a

⁴⁵ Charlotte Brontë and her sisters had terrible experiences as governesses; one need only read Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* to see a depiction of how badly governesses could be treated.

governess is repulsive. But the most convincing voice against being a governess is that of Mrs. Pryor, Caroline's mother.

Mrs. Pryor serves as an important counterexample to Caroline's willingness to take any occupation, including becoming a governess. Mrs. Pryor had been a governess before her marriage, and served as a paid companion to Shirley during the time of the novel. Before she reveals herself to be Caroline's mother, she speaks to Caroline about her horrible experiences as a governess, where she endured verbal abuse, overwork, and social degradation. She tells Caroline,

my trials were severe, poignant. . . . I should not like you to endure similar ones. . . .I was early given to understand, that 'as I was not their equal,' so I could not expect 'to have their sympathy.' . . . The gentlemen, I found, regarded me as a 'tabooed woman,' The ladies too made it plain that they thought me 'a bore.' The servants, it was signified, 'detested me'. (363)

Mrs. Pryor's experience serves to detour Caroline from the only occupation open to her at the time. She does not bring up being a governess again.

Women's professional opportunities and women's place in other social areas are connected for Caroline, especially with respect to the contemporary Christian perception of a woman's role. Starting with an allusion to the proverb about the "virtuous woman" who works outside of the home and still provides for her family, Caroline constructs an argument for how working benefits both women and their

families.⁴⁶ In another focalized internal monologue, she says of the “virtuous woman”:

‘she had something more to do than spin and give out portions: she was a manufacturer—she made fine linen and sold it: she was an agriculturalist—she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager: she was what the matrons hereabouts call “a clever woman” King of Israel! your model of a woman is a worthy model! But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her? Men of Yorkshire! do your daughters reach this royal standard? Can they reach it?” Can you help them to reach it? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow?’ (378, emphasis original)

By categorizing the “virtuous woman’s” tasks as finite occupations—manufacturer, agriculturalist, and manager—she is arguing that there is a precedent, and even a higher standard, that the women in her community are not allowed to reach.⁴⁷

Caroline goes further, extending her argument to all of England: “Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in

⁴⁶ Proverbs 31:10-31 describes a woman who works the fields, makes and sells cloth, and provides for the needs of her household and community. She is often presented in church doctrine as the ideal woman.

⁴⁷ During Caroline’s visit to their home, 12-year-old Rose Yorke makes a similar argument using a different biblical allusion. She uses Matthew 25: 14-30, saying,

and if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will *not* deposit it into a broken-spouted tea-pot I will *not* commit it to your work-table Mother, the Lord who gave each of us our talents will come home some day, and will demand from all an account. . . . suffer your daughters, at least, to put their money to the changers, that they may be enabled at their Master’s coming to pay him his own with usury. (377-378)

Having Caroline’s views reiterated by a 12-year-old whose name echoes that of Yorkshire is an important indication that Caroline is not alone in her suffering, her desires, or her logic.

consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids,—envious, backbiting, wretched, because life is a desert to them” (378). Finally, she brings her argument back to the men that have the most direct and immediate influence on girls and women before they are married, fathers:

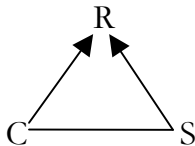
‘Fathers! cannot you alter these things? . . . You would wish to be proud of your daughters and not blush for them-- then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manoeuvrer, the mischief-making talebearer. Keep your girls’ minds narrow and fettered—they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you: cultivate them—give them scope and work—they will be your gayest companions in health; your tenderest nurses in sickness; your most faithful prop in age’. (378-379)

It does not matter that Caroline has no father because this plea is not for herself; it is far bigger. The focalization offers a bit of distance for the narrator from this impassioned plea, but still allows it to be expressed. Interestingly, Shirley has the same professions as the “virtuous woman.” She is a manufacturer, an agriculturalist, and a manager. She is the example of the virtuous woman without the marriage. But like Solomon’s woman, who must toil through the night to do her domestic duties so that she has time for her other duties, Shirley’s power is limited, as is Caroline’s plea. Just as Frances Henri had to cater to Crimsworth’s domestic comforts to ensure her professional autonomy in *The Professor*, Caroline promises the men of England that granting women professional opportunities will make them better companions.

While Caroline's marriage prospects and occupation are limited, Shirley's are less so. She has multiple marriage offers, and Caroline and others in the communities decide as soon as Shirley arrives in the neighborhood that her attachment to Robert is inevitable. Caroline loves Robert, and thinks that Shirley is also interested in him. In a monologue focalized through Caroline, the narrator says

'Of course, I know he will marry Shirley' were her first words when she rose in the morning, 'And he ought to marry her: she can help him' she added firmly. 'But I shall be forgotten when they are married,' was the cruel succeeding thought. 'Oh! I shall be wholly forgotten! And what—*what* shall I do when Robert is taken away from me . . . *My* Robert! I wish I could justly call him mine: but I am poverty and incapacity; Shirley is wealth and power: and she is beauty too, and love—I cannot deny it. This is no sordid suit: she loves him.' (262)

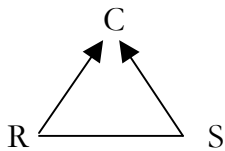
The third person narrator focalizes through Caroline, again marked with single quotation marks, but also occasionally pulls out of the internal monologue to accentuate her thoughts. In this way and others, Brontë uses third-person narration to create this love triangle between Shirley, Caroline, and Robert:



For example, Caroline witnesses Shirley and Robert walking and talking one night, and assumes that they have become lovers. During one meeting of the three, the

narrator says “Miss Keeldar looked happy in conversing with [Robert], and her joy seemed twofold,—a joy of the past and present, of memory and hope,” but in the next line, the narrator emphasizes that she was focalizing through Caroline, stating “What I have just said are Caroline’s ideas of the pair: she felt what has just been described” (254). In another instance, after focalizing through Caroline to show her assumptions and her anguish, the narrator has Caroline leave while “The reader is privileged to remain, and see what he can make of the discourse” (240). This discourse that the reader is allowed to overhear but Caroline is not, is strictly business-related. Of course, even though this meeting is platonic, there is still the very real possibility that they will become married because their social positions make them an obvious couple for practical reasons. In conversations, Shirley speaks highly of Robert, calling him a “handsome fellow” and “both graceful and good” (225) and does not directly deny the possibility.

There is also an interesting alternate triangle where Shirley and Robert are vying for Caroline’s love and attention:



Shirley tells Caroline,

‘All my comfort . . . is broken up by [Robert’s] manœuvres. He keeps intruding between you and me: without him we should be good friends; but that six feet of puppyhood makes a perpetually recurring

eclipse of our friendship. Again and again he crosses and obscures the disk I want always to see clear: ever and anon he renders me to you a mere bore and nuisance. . . . You did not want my society this afternoon, and I feel it hard If we were but left unmolested, I have that regard for you that I could bear you in my presence for ever, and not for the fraction of a second do I ever wish to be rid of you.' (264)

Nancy Langer notes that "When Shirley Keeldar enters the text, she immediately disrupts narrative convention by replacing Robert, at least temporarily, as Caroline's primary 'compatriot' and advisor; her entrance defers the text's impulses toward a Caroline-Robert union and allows Shirley to appropriate and transform Robert's role as patriarchal center of narrative" (282). Caroline and Shirley offer one another companionship and intellectual stimulation without the restrictions of marriage. But this homosocial relationship is ultimately not enough for either women, they both still want the men that they love.

By the end of the novel, Robert's financial difficulties are resolved and he and Caroline are able to marry, thereby removing her fear of becoming a useless, selfless old maid. And there is at least hope for more occupation for her time. After they become engaged, Robert tells Caroline, "Such a Sunday-school as you will have, Cary! . . . such a day-school as you and Shirley, and Miss Ainley will have to manage between you! The mill shall find salaries for a master and mistress" (598). Although the novel does not give further information about Caroline's occupations, it is clear from this statement that Robert understands her need to be active, and will facilitate her

activity. Caroline's only opportunity for active employment comes through marriage, in direct contrast to Shirley's lessening of professional power as a result of marriage.

The focalized narration allows the reader access to both women's thoughts, and these passages, coupled with the passages where Caroline and Shirley discuss the perception of women in business, in the church, in relationships, and even to male writers, present a very liberated discussion of the plight of 19th-Century women. As Caroline's coupling of women's professional needs and religion demonstrates, the general social perception of a woman and a woman's role is inseparable from the issues of professionalization and relationships. The many conversations that Shirley and Caroline have about men, women, and their roles could have taken place in a first person narrative, but only third person focalized narration allows the reader to see the inner thoughts of both women during these conversations and when they are alone. Caroline and Shirley discuss many issues of gender inequality, on topics ranging from business to religion to writing. These conversations mark both women as advanced and independent thinkers and feminists by today's terminology. A regular theme of these conversations and internal monologues are men and their misperceptions about women. In one conversation, Shirley tells Caroline: "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: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend" (343). *Shirley* was published five years before Coventry Patmore's now infamous poem, "The Angel in the House," but the

expectation that women be meek, powerless, pious and pure was an understood part of the mid-nineteenth-century image of the ideal woman. Shirley continues her critique of men's misunderstandings of women's character:

Then to hear them fall into ecstasies with each other's creations,
 worshipping the heroine of such a poem—novel—drama, thinking it
 fine—divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial—false
 as the rose in my best bonnet there. If I spoke all I think on this point;
 if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-
 rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones
 in half an hour. (343)

In art, as in life, women's professional and personal possibilities were limited by men.⁴⁸ *Shirley* is a strong counter-voice to the prevalent presentation of weak-minded, feeble women, the very characteristics used as part of the reasoning for women staying in the home and not working.

Shirley and Caroline clearly do not fit the mold of the angel in the house. Although they are in quite different power positions in the community, both women are surprisingly candid about their opinions on social and personal issues. In a heated conversation, Shirley taunts Robert Moore with the ability of either Caroline or herself to out-manuever him because he cannot read them. She realizes the threat she poses, saying, “You think me a dangerous specimen of my sex. Don't you, now?” (352). As an interloper into the male realms of property and business ownership, she

⁴⁸ Interestingly, Charles Dickens is writing *David Copperfield*, which contains another famous reference to an angel in the house, when *Shirley* is published.

is an obvious challenger of the patriarchal status quo. But as she is quick to point out to Robert, she is not the only threat. She says of Caroline, “Caroline is neither masculine, nor of what they call the spirited order of women Miss Helstone, though gentle, tractable, and candid enough, is still perfectly capable of defying even Mr. Moore’s penetration” (352). Though quieter, poorer, and with few prospects for a future beyond spinsterhood and dependence, Caroline is also a threat to male hegemony because she is an independent thinker who can act on her own.

Shirley and Caroline directly challenge Christian doctrine that insists on the inferiority and submission of women. Instead of attending a church service, the women engage in a heretical conversation about religion and a woman’s place in it, starting with Eve. Shirley tells Caroline, “The first woman’s breast that heaved with life on this world yielded the daring which could contend with Omnipotence: the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage” (315). This statement precedes an argument about a woman’s place in the church and home with Joe Scott, a man who, “holding supercilious theories about women in general, resented greatly, in his secret soul, the fact of his master and his master’s mill being, in a manner, under petticoat government, and had felt as wormwood and gall, certain business-visits of the heiress to the Hollow’s counting-house” (321). Outranked in business, he seeks to put Shirley in her subservient place with religion, using Paul’s command in I Timothy that women be silent in the church and let their husbands speak for them to argue that women “is to take their husbands’ opinion, both in politics and religion: it’s wholesomest for them” (323). Shirley’s response is a sophisticated analysis of the

socio-historical context of the writing of the epistle that also questions the validity of the translation. Shirley and Caroline's sophisticated use of logic and reason is contrasted with Joe's nonstandard grammar and constant refrain that "[he] cannot argue, where [he] cannot be comprehended" (322). Joe Scott represents the shortsighted, unreasonable assumptions that insist on keeping women confined to the home and out of business and politics. The women clearly best him verbally, but this conquest is isolated to the winning of an argument. Both women, as well as the readers, are all too aware that Joe's narrow-minded philosophies represent those of the ruling order.

The last description of Shirley is given by the unnamed narrator's maid, who says of her, "Mrs. Louis smiled when she talked: she had a real happy, glad, good-natured look; but she had een [sic] that pierced a body through: there is no such ladies now-a-days" (599). Having the last mention of Shirley come from a maid links Shirley and Caroline's narrative of professionalization with the powerless plight of all working women. Although their situation was not the same as the maid's and they certainly had advantages that the maid did not, all are in subordinate positions to men. It also draws attention to the fact that, as Langland states, "just as Brontë understands and represents the ways in which class can shape individual experience, she also recognizes that gender, as a category, is non-negotiable. Class may change; gender does not. In short, women remain entrenched in the contradictions of their worlds" (28).

The fact that the woman says that ladies such as Shirley no longer exist emphasizes another point made by Langland, that “Brontë’s whole tale is a ‘dream of dawn.’ The world from which the narrator writes—these ‘dusty late years’ with their arid ‘showers of curates’—remains untransformed” (32). The fairies fled after Shirley and Caroline’s marriages. The maid is still laboring under a patriarchal system, as is everyone else, including Shirley and Caroline while they were still alive. Women still have little to no real room to work productively. Langland claims that, “The point of the conclusion is that these contradictions persist. . . . The feminist and patriarchal visions will not meld. . . . The novel’s deconstruction of romance and reality requires a conclusion that we read as both success and failure, as realistic and romantic, a conclusion to that does justice to the novel’s multiple voices” (33). I would apply this same argument to Shirley’s finally agreeing to marry Louis. She gives up some of her professional autonomy in order to have a relationship. Caroline, on the other hand, gains more occupation from working, but this work is still limited.

The novel ends with the following disclaimer from the narrator: “The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in his quest!” (599). The narrator invites us to look for the moral. Though quite tongue in cheek, this novel, more than any of Brontë’s others, concerns the ‘condition of England’. The novel ends in a conflation of past, present, and future as the narrator reverts to first person and tells of the marriages of Caroline and Shirley and relates them directly to the future fate of the mill. Personal lives and professional are

intertwined, and include both the men and the women. Perhaps the strongest lesson, if there is one, is from Caroline's interior monologue that I quoted to begin my chapter. Women long for something important, active, meaningful, and powerful to do, and are better people, citizens, and companions if they are allowed to have active occupation. The concerns of the Luddites who fear for their jobs is primarily presented as a monetary one. The men fear that they will not be able to financially support their families. The occupational concerns of the middle and upper class woman are presented not as financial necessities, but as being vital to the emotional and spiritual self. When describing her life with Mrs. Pryor at the rectory, Caroline says, "it is scarcely *living* to measure time as I do at the rectory. I endure existence, but I rarely enjoy it" (362). To have an occupation is to live.

CHAPTER FOUR

“I seemed to hold two lives’:
Disclosing the Unnarratable in *Villette*

You say that [Lucy Snowe] may be thought morbid and weak unless the history of her life be more fully given. . . . I might explain away a few other points but it would be too much like drawing a picture and then writing underneath the name of the object intended to be represented.—Charlotte Brontë, in a letter to W.S. Williams.⁴⁹

Lucy Snowe, the heroine of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, is one of the most enigmatic characters in literature. Although the novel is presented as an autobiographical account by the first person narrator, much more is said about what Lucy Snowe is not than what she is. At one point in the novel, an exasperated pupil exclaims, “Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?” (307, emphasis original). Her response, “Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise” is perhaps the most honest answer to the question of her identity in the novel (308). Why is she in disguise? What is she hiding? Lucy is the most independent, and the most lonely, heroine in Brontë’s novels. She actively seeks her own position, educates herself, and maintains and expands the school M. Paul helped to make possible. She is the only Brontë heroine who does not marry. One reason why Lucy may feel the need for secrecy and deception is because she is retrospectively writing a narrative that will end outside of the bounds of the traditional marriage plot. Brontë chose to have Lucy’s fiancé drown, thereby allowing Lucy to have an intellectually and emotionally fulfilling relationship with a man without the legal and patriarchal ramifications of marriage.

⁴⁹ Letter to W.S. Williams, 6 November, 1852 (Smith, Vol. III 80).

Lucy is able to experience romantic love and intellectual companionship as well as professional success. In addition to being the headmistress of her own pensionnat, she is also an author, and narrates her own retrospective autobiography, thereby joining the two intellectual professions of the previous novels within one autonomous woman. Lucy is a woman who retrospectively writes the novel as a successful businessperson, a situation that could threaten her standing as a socially acceptable woman. In the interest of self-preservation, she presents her success as the result of circumstance and other's actions, removing all blame from herself. She also refuses to narrate anything that could interfere with this presentation, offering instead narrative misdirections, metalepses, substitutions, and evasions. In doing so, she succeeds in "[achieving] a neat, frosty falsehood" (320). The narrative substitutions and evasions serve to protect an autobiographical narrator with a non-normative worldview who is writing a story that does not conform to traditional marriage plot conventions, and who ends the narrative an autonomous, self-employed single woman.

In many ways, *Villette* (1853) is the culmination of the work and relationship issues in the three previous novels. It is, as many critics have said, most obviously a retelling of *The Professor* from the woman's perspective, but there are echoes of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* as well. Brontë once again created a retrospective first person female narrator. Unlike Jane Eyre, however, Lucy Snowe does not fully disclose her background and is often secretive, yet Lucy directly addresses the reader 44 times. These addresses often serve either to direct the reader to recall a previous incident or

to explain away narrative omission or secrecy. An example of direct omission can be found in the chapter titled, “The Concert;” Lucy says, “On the concert I need not dwell; the reader would not care to have my impressions thereanent [sic]: and indeed, it would not be worth while to record them, as they were the impressions of an ignorant crasse” (215). These addresses to the reader create an implied reader who accepts the narrative omissions, distractions, and directions of the narrator. However, their existence as an overt part of the text has the opposite effect on a “real” reader. Wolfgang Iser says that the implied reader

embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader (163).

At its simplest, the implied reader is the reader created (and in this case even addressed) by the narrator.

Villette's many narrative evasions have led to much discussion of unreliability. The issue of unreliability in this text is complex because the text calls into question the very definition of unreliability. According to Wayne Booth's original definition, unreliable narration occurs when a narrator does not speak or act in accordance with the implied author's norms (158-159). This definition works well for narratives that have a discernable distance between narrator and implied author, such as *The Professor*,

but it does not help with other texts, such as *Villette*, in which this distance is not as distinct, and yet narratorial reliability is questionable.

To deal with this and other problems of discerning unreliable narrators, James Phelan and Mary Martin, in “The Lessons of ‘Weymouth’: Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics and *The Remains of the Day*,” expanded and codified unreliability to distinguish six different types: underreporting and misreporting, underregarding and misregarding, and underreading and misreading. This expanded understanding of unreliability “allows us to move away from the common assumption that reliability and unreliability are a binary pair, that once any unreliability is detected all the narration is suspect, and, instead, to recognize that narrators exist along a wide spectrum from reliability to unreliability” (Phelan and Martin 96). Lucy is clearly guilty of underreporting and misreporting, so she is unreliable according to that definition. Underreporting is the narrator “not [admitting] to his narratee what both he and the authorial audience know about his personal interest;” in other words, the narrator tells less than she knows (92). Misreporting involves reporting the wrong information or leaving crucial information out of an account. When Lucy narrates the scene where she stares at Dr. John but does not there reveal to the narratee that she recognizes the man to be John Graham Bretton, she is misreporting. Phelan and Martin’s analysis takes the question of reliability from a character trait to a hermeneutic device through which a reader accounts for incongruity.

Hermeneutic ethics are associated with the obligations readers and critics have to reading and interpreting texts (99-100). Phelan and Martin focus on “how the very act of reading entails ethical engagement and response” and posit that

while the ethical dimension of reading engages our values and judgments, it is deeply intertwined with cognition, emotion, and desire: our understanding influences our sense of which values the text is calling forth, the activation of those values influences our judgments, our judgments influence our feelings, and our feelings our desires.

(100)

In exploring Lucy’s motivations for underreporting, unnarrating, and disnarrating, I am attempting to understand how these narrative strategies affect the reader. How can Lucy be clearly unreliable, yet still be a sympathetic character with whom the reader bonds? If there is a legitimate reason for Lucy’s narrative omissions and misleadings, then understanding those reasons can explain how the reader desires to believe Lucy and accept her narration. Lucy is narrating a story that will end in her living single and independent, successfully operating her own business and writing her own autobiography. Ambitious, independent women were not socially acceptable, as Brontë learned when Poet Laureate Robert Southey told her that “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life and, it ought not to be” (Smith, *Letters Vol. I* 166-167). To tell her story without alienating a contemporary audience, Lucy must hide and misdirect her ambition and her independence. The

undernarrating that occurs serves to protect her image as a socially acceptable woman.

Lucy legitimizes this strategy of “keeping [harmful] facts out of sight” generically when she says

If a man feels that he would become contemptible in his own eyes were it generally known that his ancestry were simple and not gentle, poor and not rich, workers and not capitalists, would it be right severely to blame him for keeping these facts out of sight—for starting, trembling, quailing at the chance which threatens exposure? wherever an accumulation of small defences is found, whether surrounding the prude’s virtue or the man of the world’s respectability, there, be sure, it is needed. (309-310)

Small defenses abound in this novel, and the need must therefore be real. The narrative includes repeated instances of substitutions for Lucy’s personal history. Polly Home’s childhood narrative is substituted for Lucy’s. Direct addresses to the reader also present metaphors, substituted questions, excuses, denials and other forms of disnarration. These narrative ambiguities have inspired much speculation among critics, who often see these ambiguities as narrative weaknesses. Helene Moglen, for example, calls Lucy an unreliable narrator whose voice is characterized by “indirection” and “neurotic rationalization”. Others, like Gilbert and Gubar, accept her evasions but do not fully analyze them as narrative techniques. Gilbert and Gubar recognize that

Lucy's life, her sense of herself, does not conform to the literary or social stereotypes provided by her culture to define and circumscribe female life Lucy cannot employ the narrative structures available to her, yet there are no existing alternatives. So she finds herself using and abusing—presenting and undercutting—images and stories of male devising, even as she omits or elides what has been deemed unsuitable, improper, or aberrant in her own experience. (418-419)

But they claim that “*Villette* is not meticulously crafted” (439). They do not make the connection that the omissions and elisions are not clunky abuses, but instead a protective act that allows Lucy to carefully control access to her story and to protect herself from condemnation as being improper. If viewed in this light, the evasions have a much more purposeful feminist function. To elucidate the *raison d'être* of the omissions and other ambiguities, I will focus on these unnarratable moments.

Analysis of the unnarratable began with Gerald Prince's 1988 article “The Disnarrated”. In this article, Prince introduced the terms the unnarratable/nonnarratable, unnarrated, and disnarrated. According to Prince, the unnarratable is “that which, *according to a given narrative*, cannot be narrated or is not worth narrating either because it transgresses a law (social, authorial, generic, formal) or because it defies the powers of a particular narrator . . . or because it falls below the so-called threshold of narratability” (1).⁵⁰ The disnarrated is that which is

⁵⁰ While I realize that some theorists may disagree with Prince's and Warhol's definitions of the unnarratable and its subcategories, I am using their definition because I am interested in adding to

explicitly not told by a narrator; it is “terms, phrases, and passages that consider what did not or does not take place (‘this could’ve happened but didn’t’; ‘this didn’t happen but could’ve’)” (3). For example, an irritated Lucy narrates about M. Paul at one point: “He came nearer. ‘Now for another hiss!’ thought I: had not the action been too uncivil I could have stopped my ears with my fingers in terror of the thrill” (320).

The disnarrated

shows that narrative is not only a matter of counting, accounting, and recounting, but also one of discounting. It insists upon the ability to conceive and manipulate hypothetical worlds or states or affairs and the freedom to reject various models of intelligibility, of coherence and significance, various norms, conventions or codes for world- and fiction-making. It institutes an antimodel in terms of which the text defines itself and indicates the aesthetics it develops and espouses, the audience it represents and aspires to, the matters, topics, and configurations this audience takes to be tellable. (Prince 6)

Robyn Warhol revived Prince’s terms in presentations at the International Narrative Conference and in her chapter on the unnarratable in Blackwell’s *A Companion to Narrative Theory*.⁵¹ Warhol categorizes disnarration and unnarration, categories of the unnarratable, as narrative acts. She retains Prince’s definition of the disnarrated as passages in a narrative that tell what did not happen, and defines unnarrated as “those

the subcategories proposed by Warhol in order to emphasize and clarify the possible narrative motivations for the unnarratable.

⁵¹ She also presented her categories in a workshop in which I participated at Dickens Universe.

passages that explicitly do not tell what is supposed to have happened, foregrounding the narrator's refusal to narrate," and sees disnarration and unnarration as part of the larger category of the unnarratable (221). Warhol complicates Prince's definition of the unnarratable by categorizing different forms into the following four possibilities:

that which, *according to a given narrative*, (1) "needn't be told (the *subnarratable*)," (2) "can't be told (the *supranarratable*)," (3) "shouldn't be told (the *antinarratable*)," and (4) "wouldn't be told" (the *paranarratable*).
(222)⁵²

The "subnarratable"—equivalent to Prince's non-narratable or "normal" narrative—are events that are "too insignificant or banal to warrant representation" (Warhol, "Neonarrative" 222). The "supranarratable" is "the unnarratable as the ineffable: events that simply cannot be retold" because they're too painful or beyond comprehension (Warhol, "Neonarrative" 223). The "antinarratable" can't be told because of social convention; for example: sex in Victorian narratives. Finally, the "paranarratable" is that which would not be told because of formal literary convention. Warhol presents the narrator not directly narrating M. Paul's death in *Villette* as an example of paranarration because the death of the future husband in a Victorian marriage plot novel "simply would not do".⁵³

Warhol's categories are an important addition to the discussion of the unnarratable because they classify different types of motivations for disnarration and

⁵² Quoted words from Prince, "The Disnarrated," 1.

⁵³ I realize that there are Victorian texts that break this norm and that there are other explanations, including the alternative that I offer later in the chapter. This is Warhol's example.

unnarration. It is the difference in motivation that distinguishes her categories, and it seems that motivation is the primary element to consider when categorizing the unnarratable. If that is the case, then I think that there is a missing category that would allow for a reevaluation of the unnarration and disnarration in *Villette*. I propose a new category—the *circumnarratable*—which I define as that which the narrator does not narrate for self-interest. This distinction is particularly important for a female autobiographical narrator (whether fictitious or non) who is presenting a representation of herself in her narration.

Although these interests can fall into several of the other categories, the motivation behind the unnarratable in these instances is different and is therefore deserving of its own category. For example, Warhol categorizes the following *Villette* passage as antinarratable because she sees it as an example of “*disnarrated trauma*” (“Neonarrative” 225 emphasis original):

I betook myself home, having been absent six smonths. It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! The amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass. . . . A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?

Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been a wreck at last. I too well remember a time—a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltness of briny waves in my throat, and their ice pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.

Like Warhol, I label this an instance of disnarration because Lucy tells what did not happen, but I find the categorization of this disnarration as antinarratable as problematic. While it is true that trauma is often not narrated, I think that this lack of narration has more to do with Lucy's desire to carefully control the information she gives about herself, especially any information that could be damaging to her social position or character. The metaphor that replaces the specific events of her life invokes sympathy from the reader without revealing any incriminating information.

One of the primary sites of the circumnarratable are the passages directly addressed to the reader or directly referencing the reader in third person. There are 44 such passages in the novel, more than any of Brontë's previous novels. These

addresses go beyond merely presenting a self-conscious narrator—as Wayne Booth terms narrators who are aware of themselves as writers (RoF 155)—they directly involve the implied reader in narrative decisions. These passages—which Garret Stewart refers to as the “dear reader” passages—create an alternate avenue for intimacy between the narrator and reader.⁵⁴ Instead of the careful relaying of information to depict a reliable narration that instills trust in the narrator, the narrator includes the reader in the decisions to omit. These passages are frequent locations of unnarration and disnarration. For example, in several instances the narrator uses the projected desires of the implied reader to omit narrative detail.

In the novel’s second dear reader passage, Lucy says “My reader, I know, is one who would not thank me for an elaborate reproduction of poetic first impressions; and it is well, inasmuch as I had neither time nor mood to cherish such” (45). In places the narrator even presents questions asked by the reader, acknowledging that the reader would like to know more, but explaining away that need. For example, in Chapter 36, Lucy says:

‘Why were you so glad to be friends with M. Paul’ asks the reader. ‘Had he not long been a friend to you? Had he not given proof on proof of a certain partiality in his feelings?’

Yes, he had; but still I liked to hear him say so earnestly—that he was my close, true friend. . . . Yes; he might call me what he pleased,

⁵⁴ Stewart includes in his “dear reader” classification both direct addresses to the reader and third-person mentions of the reader (22-23). For a detailed analysis of *Villette*’s “dear reader” passages, see chapter 9 of Garret Stewart. *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*.

so long as he confided in me. I was willing to be his sister, on condition that he did not invite me to fill that relation to some future wife of his; and tacitly vowed as he was to celibacy, of this dilemma there seemed little danger. (409)⁵⁵

By providing these questions and a partial answer, Lucy acknowledges that the reader has many unanswered questions about the relationship, but controls both the questions asked and the answer given. Hence, an act of evasion is presented as an act of disclosure. This passage is an example of circumnarration because the answer given is a protective one. The topic of a lady's feelings for a man is a delicate one, and her answer presents her feelings as being heartfelt and platonic, going as far as to reference *his* celibacy. Very little of the passion that Lucy feels for Dr. John or this "little man" is allowed to directly enter the narration.

In other "dear reader" passages, Lucy advises the reader what not to think or feel about events or people. She begins the chapter entitled "M. Paul" with "Yet the reader is advised not to be in any hurry with his kindly conclusions, or to suppose, with an over-hasty charity, that from that day M. Paul became a changed character" (348). Again, Lucy tells the reader what not to assume, without giving any details about the actual state of things. The reader of this text must be active and alert, constantly reconstructing the backstory that is not directly given. This mode of

⁵⁵ This passage so clearly echoes the relationship that Brontë had with M. Heger in Brussels that it introduces a motivation for Brontë to distance herself from her narrative just as Lucy does in places. Although I will not be discussing this aspect of the novel, it bears mentioning.

writing could easily irritate and distance a reader, but Lucy also takes active steps to retain a relationship with the reader.

While she uses the “dear reader” passages to evade, distract, and dissuade the reader, Lucy also uses them to retain a discursive relationship with the reader that retains intimacy. She even directly conflates herself and her reader, directly including “us” in her recounting. Ginevra Fanshawe is “our former acquaintance” (129) and when Lucy is narrating her experience at the fête, she says, “We have looked at the city belle; we have cursorily glanced at the respectable old uncle and aunt. Have we a stray glance to give to the third member of this company: Can we spare a moment’s notice? We ought to distinguish him so far; reader; he has claims on us; we do not now meet him for the first time” (465). This interaction implies that “we” the reader have much more direct control over narratorial attention than we actually do.

Despite their abundant *not* telling, this discourse creates an atmosphere of intimacy.

One of the ways that Lucy presents herself as unnarratable is by repeatedly discussing how others misconstrue her. She frequently presents others’ misperceptions and confusion about her without giving direct information on the correct way to view her. Ginevra’s “Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?” is at the heart of this text, and many people think that they have the answer. Lucy allows them to think what they want, and seems to enjoy observing them make assumptions about her:

The light in which M. de Bassompierre evidently regarded “Miss Snowe,” used to occasion me much inward edification. What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us,

according to the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional perhaps, too strict, limited and scrupulous . . . whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature—adventurous, indocile, and audacious. I smiled at them all. (301)

The use of “us” and “we” in this description joins the reader with Lucy in her experience of being viewed and misjudged. But the reader cannot help but feel that Lucy is smiling at him/her too, because she has been most of these things at different points in the narrative.

Another self-defensive act of unnarration is Lucy’s lack of direct narration about her personal views on femininity. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, which includes many passionate passages on women’s conditions, Lucy has little to say on the subject. Her views must be gleaned from her perceptions of other women presented in the text. Polly (Paulina) Mary Home, Madame Beck, and Ginevra all present different models of femininity, and Lucy’s presentation of each serves important purposes in allowing her not to narrate her own views. Even more symbolic representations of women, such as the gallery paintings and the actress Vashti, help to illuminate Lucy’s views without requiring her to narrate them directly.

Polly is perhaps the most important alternative representation of womanhood because she acts as a direct substitution for Lucy in two ways. First, her childhood narrative is given instead of Lucy's. Second, she becomes the wife of Dr. John Graham Bretton, one of Lucy's potential suitors. Although Lucy's childhood and her time with her godmother is presented with little detail, a great deal of time is spent presenting the childhood experience of Paulina (Polly) Home. Polly's history serves as a distraction to divert the reader from the lack of information about Lucy.⁵⁶ Polly's substituted childhood also presents an exaggerated model of a female child who embraces societal norms of femininity and womanhood.

Polly arrives at Mrs. Bretton's (Lucy's godmother) house while Lucy is living there, and is constantly described by Lucy as doll-like. Her first description of Polly is, "she appeared exceedingly tiny; but with a neat, completely-fashioned little figure, light, slight, and straight. . . . she looked a mere doll" (8). Polly is especially attached to John Bretton, Mrs. Bretton's son. She acts the part of the female head of house with John, pouring and serving his tea, asking for and serving him treats, and generally seeking to cater to his domestic comforts. While this domestic scene is, in part, portrayed as parodic—Polly can barely lift the tea pot, she constantly pricks her finger while attempting embroidery, John laughs at her efforts, and indulges her at times while rebuffing her "play" at others—Polly takes her duties seriously. Polly is acting out the need to be the opposite of her flighty mother, who abandoned her

⁵⁶ Other theorists have speculated that Brontë originally intended for Polly to be the protagonist and changed her mind mid draft (Sinclair 156) or even that it is Lucy the narrator who is sidetracked by her own story and not Brontë (O'Dea 45).

family to party and died as a result. Her father is not present, so she seeks to prove her conventional feminine nature by serving John.

Polly's feminine model is subverted in many ways. Lucy describes her character at one point as "a one-ideal nature; betraying that monomaniac tendency I have ever thought the most unfortunate with which man or woman can be cursed" (12). Polly's attentions and efforts are constantly described as being excessive, even absurd. When Polly's father comes to visit, the scene is described as "a scene of feeling too brimful, and which, because the cup did not foam up high or furiously overflow, only oppressed one the more (13)." Polly's attempts at other domestic activities, too, are painful to watch.

Polly returns to the narrative as an adult, and serves another substitutive purpose: that of wife to John Graham Bretton. Although Lucy's presentation of Polly as a child is mocking, presentation of her as an adult is different. Paulina is still acting the part of traditional woman, remaining child-like to her father and demure to John, but Lucy claims to have real affection for her. Lucy says

I liked her. It is not a declaration I have often made concerning my acquaintance, in the course of this book; the reader will bear with it for once. Intimate intercourse, close inspection, disclosed in Paulina only what was delicate, intelligent, and sincere; therefore my regard for her lay deep. (371)

This amiable declaration can be understood in a number of ways. As the future wife of a man whom Lucy loves, bitter words or feelings could appear as jealousy, so it is a

self-protective act to declare affection for her. More obviously, Paulina represents what socially acceptable women are supposed to be like. While Lucy does not hate her for being as she is expected to be, Lucy is certainly as much a counterexample to Paulina's sincere acceptance of the feminine stereotype as an adult as she was when they were children. Since Lucy's adult reality is far from traditional, and since her childhood views on domestic subjects are not clear (other than through her reactions to Polly, which are limited), Polly's ultra-formulaic acting out of womanhood distracts the reader from Lucy's lack of disclosure about herself.

The female character in the novel who most overtly represents the opposite of Paulina's sincere demurity is Madame Beck, who is one of Lucy's most important teachers in her observations of success. In many ways Madame Beck is a rewriting of *The Professor's* Middle. [sic] Reuter. Both are successful, independent women who are also cunning, devious, and self-serving. Lucy observes Madame Beck, even admires her tactics. She says of her at one point "Madame was not weak . . . I clapped the hands of my heart, and with its voice cried 'brava!' as I watched her able bearing, her skilled management, her temper and her firmness" (100). Lucy actively and frequently narrates Madame Beck's activities and spying tactics. What remains unnarrated is that Lucy is as observant in her snooping as her superior, and sometimes even more successful.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Even though Lucy's observing and snooping is easy to see, it is not discussed directly, even when she is actively snooping or observing, so her snooping remains unnarrated according to Prince's definition of the term.

Lucy immediately recognizes and understands Madame Beck's modus operandi. She says of Madame Beck

woe be to that man or woman who relied on her one inch beyond the point where it was her interest to be trustworthy: interest was the master-key of madame's nature—the mainspring of her motives—the alpha and omega of her life. I have seen her *feelings* appealed to, and I have smiled in half-pity, half-scorn at the appellants. . . . It proved to her that she had no heart to be touched: it reminded her where she was impotent and dead. (74)

Madame Beck is an example of one avenue of professional autonomy for women: have no heart so that a desire for social ties does not interfere. Lucy's presentation of Madame Beck acknowledges the power gained from this path, but also recognizes its limitations. Madame Beck is another of Dr. John's potential suitors. Lucy says of Madame Beck "had she, indeed, floating visions of adopting Dr. John as a husband, taking him to her well-furnished home, endowing him with her savings, which were said to amount to a moderate competency, and making him comfortable for the rest of his life?" (102). This presentation clearly implies that Madame Beck had much financial and personal autonomy to lose in taking a husband. But to be successful, a part of her is "impotent and dead." The unnarrated dilemma for Lucy is how to achieve Madame Beck's success without sacrificing her ability to feel. It is unnarrated because Lucy never directly says that she is trying to find a way to gain Madame

Beck's professional success without having to become as cold and detached as Madame Beck. To narrate this directly would be to acknowledge her ambition.

Part of Lucy's self-guarding deception is her denial of ambition. Like the reader passages that assuage fault, she often dismisses her own talents and ambitions and places the blame for her occupational improvements on others. When she's working as a personal assistant to Miss Marchmont she claims, "I would have crawled on with her for twenty years. . . . It seemed I must be stimulated into action. I must be goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy. My little morsel of human affection, which I prized as if it were a solid pearl, must melt in my fingers and slip thence like a dissolving hailstone" (38). While it's probable that Lucy was emotionally connected to Miss Marchmont and needed her removal to look for something else (much like Jane Eyre with Miss Temple), Lucy's story ultimately demonstrates that she not only has ambition, but employs much skill in observing others and learning from them how to achieve success. When Madame Beck approaches her to teach an English class for the first time, she claims

if left to myself, I should infallibly have let this chance slip.

Inadventurous, unstimulated by impulses of practical ambition, I was capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses, and making children's frocks. . . . Besides, I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic

joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter. (76-77)

By claiming a lack of ambition, Lucy avoids the condemnation of those who look down upon ambitious women. But she is ultimately successful, and by the end of the novel, she is able to have two professions—writing and running her own pensionnat—that allow her to bring her two lives together.

This lack of ambition is in part disproved during and after teaching her first course. During the recounting of her first lesson, Lucy says “though I knew I looked a poor creature, and in many respects actually was so, yet nature had given me a voice that could make itself heard, if lifted in excitement or deepened by emotion” (80). Lucy admits her power—she does have “a voice that could make itself heard”—but tempers this admission by bracketing it with a declaration of herself as a poor creature who requires excitement or deepened emotion to be called to use her voice.⁵⁸ After she begins teaching, she says that “Life was pleasant. I felt I was getting on: not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use” (82). Her promotion to English teacher is an important step in her professional advancement. Not only does it give her teaching experience, it prompts her to become more proficient in French, which is necessary for her continued career in Brussels. Further evidence of her ambition can be found in her continuing to study other subjects and languages. This study is

⁵⁸ This need for a stimulus to instigate her voice is an interesting echo of *Jane Eyre*. But whereas Jane quieted her voice to retain social acceptance in her circle of acquaintances, Lucy’s declaration of needing to be spurred into action is made to retain social acceptance from her reader.

only mentioned in passing. For example, while students are studying in the evening and the other teachers are doing needlework, Lucy is studying German (116). We even learn that M. Paul has been giving her private lessons as an aside.

Eventually, teaching a class is not enough to satisfy Lucy and she becomes restless again. But she is not satisfied with a less empowered opportunity. Mr. Home offers her a well-paid position as Polly's companion, and she declines, telling the reader, "I was no bright lady's shadow . . . my qualifications were not convertible, not adaptable . . . Madame Beck and I, without assimilating, understood each other well. I was not *her* companion, nor her children's governess; she left me free: she tied me to nothing" (298). She has more freedom at Madame Beck's as a teacher. But this freedom is not enough either. She often ponders "how [she] should make some advance in life, take another step towards an independent position" and says that she "had laid half a plan" (360-361). Her plan is to save enough money to rent enough space to start teach day students and eventually expand to her own pensionnat. She tells M. Paul this plan and he enables her to act it out by renting the rooms and furnishing them appropriately for an externat, but it is her plan that he enacts, and the rent that first year and thereafter comes from her savings (489). Ginevra asks her at one point, "But *are* you anybody?" and she replies "Yes. . . I am a rising character: once an old lady's companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school teacher" (309). By the end of the novel, pensionnat directress and author can be added to the list.

While Lucy denies her ambition, M. Paul sees it, and even enables it, an unusual act for a romantic hero. Before the final examination he tells her,

“Ainsi, . . . vous allez trôner comme une reine demain—trôner à mes côtés? Sans doute vous savourez d’avance les délices de l’autorité. Je crois voir en vous je ne sais quoi de rayonnante, petite ambitieuse! One ought to be ‘dur’ with you. You are one of those beings who must be *kept down*. I know you! I know you! Other people in this house see you pass, and think that a colourless shadow has gone by. As for me, I scrutinized your face once, and it sufficed. . . . [I] saw a passionate ardour for triumph in your physiognomy. What fire shot into the glance! Not mere light, but flame: je me tins pour averti.” (154-155, emphasis original)⁵⁹

Although Lucy denies his accusations, saying “Now the fact was, he happened to be entirely mistaken,” the clarification of that mistake—“I speak of the case as it stood. On me school-triumphs shed but a cold lustre”—does not deny any ambition, only the ambition for the paltry triumphs of such things as school plays (154). While he is not entirely wrong in my view, he is wrong to limit her ambitions to one small class. Despite his statement that she must be “kept down,” he in fact encourages her studies and helps to set her up with her own school before he sails away. But he also sees her as a young woman who needs to be protected and sheltered. He wants to exert control over her ambition and her ideas. He feeds her desire for knowledge by leaving her books, but those books are of his choosing. When he sees her looking at

⁵⁹ So, you are going to be enthroned like a queen tomorrow—enthroned beside me? Doubtless you are savoring in advance the delights of authority. I believe I see in you a kind of desire to shine, you ambitious little woman! I consider myself warned.

the painting of “Cleopatra,”⁶⁰ a prostitute in a museum, he is appalled and moves her to look at a series of paintings that depict the stages of a socially acceptable woman’s life.⁶¹ Lucy is resistant to these restrictions, staring at “Cleopatra” from across the room and openly admitting it to Paul. His desire to control her ambition serves her well in the end. He rents the rooms and provides the equipment to start her school, but then goes away, giving her the opportunity to make her school successful by herself.

Lucy has two potential suitors in *Villette*. Dr. John Graham Bretton and M. Paul Emmanuel. M. Paul is ultimately the love interest of the marriage plot and becomes Lucy’s fiancé, but *Villette*’s marriage plot has no marriage. But the marriage plot form is altered even before it fails to come to completion in matrimony. In fact, much more of the courtship is *not* narrated than is narrated. Very little direct interaction between Lucy and M. Paul is directly narrated. The reader knows that “that hand of M. Emanuel’s was on intimate terms with [her] desk” (343) and that “M. Emanuel had been very kind to me of late days; he had been hourly better and kinder. . . he had come oftener. . . he had spent hours with me” (441), but the reader rarely sees this interaction. M. Paul has been giving Lucy private lessons for months before the reader finds out. Conversations—even very important ones—between Lucy and M. Paul are paraphrased rather than directly included. After he shows her the sign for her externat, Lucy claims lack of memory as the reason for not narrating

⁶⁰ Believed to reference a picture of “Une Almée” (“A Dancing Girl”) by De Biefve, exhibited at the Salon de Bruxelles in 1842.

⁶¹ Believed to reference a series by Fanny Geefs called “La vie d’une femme,” also exhibited at the Salon de Bruxelles in 1842. The stages depicted were “Young Girl”, “Wife”, “Young Mother”, and “Widow”.

what happens after, saying “I can no more remember the thoughts or words of the ten minutes succeeding this disclosure, than I can retrace the experience of my earliest year of life” (486). The courtship, rather than being the focus of the plot, exists on the margins until the novel’s close, and even then is less important than the founding of Lucy’s school, proving that the novel is about much more than the marriage plot.

M. Paul’s death does not remove the tension between autonomy and love. Rather, the absence of resolution heightens the tension, creating the most poignant ending of all of Brontë’s novels. In the last chapter, Lucy tells the reader: “M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox? Listen” (493). During these three years, Lucy has both love and professional autonomy. She operates and expands her own school, and she has a continued relationship with M. Emanuel through letters. He is far enough away to not threaten Lucy’s autonomy, but she still has a fulfilling emotional and intellectual relationship. Brontë chooses to have Lucy’s fiancé drown, thereby allowing her to have an intellectually and emotionally fulfilling relationship with a man without the legal and patriarchal ramifications of marriage. Lucy narrates the above statement to the reader retrospectively, so she knows that he is dead when writing the lines. The paradox is that Lucy can be most happy when she has a relationship without the threat of legal or emotional patriarchal control, but the only way to have both is for M. Emanuel to die before they are married. In addition to being the headmistress of her own pensionat, Lucy also has another profession:

writing. Like Jane, she too is an author, and narrates her own retrospective autobiography, thereby joining the two intellectual professions of the previous novels within one autonomous woman. Lucy's "two lives," that of intellectual thought and that of reality, come together in her writing of the book, but she withholds much of herself from her readers.

The narrative comes out of retrospection and into the present tense and ends with M. Paul's death, the only possible ending of this marriage plot novel since the possibility of marriage is gone, the only other potential suitor is already married, and there is no real interest in replacing Paul. But the reader knows that this is not the true zero point—the point where the temporal interval between the retrospective reported action and the present of the narrating act converges—because an earlier aside has informed the reader that the story is written during a much later time in Lucy's life, when "[her] hair, which till a late period withstood the frosts of time, lies now at last, white under a white cap, like snow beneath snow" (45).⁶² The implied narrative that remains is of a woman who continues to live (presumably) alone and independent, operating her own business and writing her own autobiography. While the marriage plot ends with M. Paul's death, Lucy's life story does not. But like other aspects of the story that are circumnarratable because they are potentially detrimental to the narrator, Lucy's life and success without a man is not directly narrated. Only in the three years when M. Paul is absent but his return and the fulfillment of the marriage plot eminent can Lucy discuss her professional achievements. In this way

⁶² See Genette, "Voice" p. 227 in *Narrative Discourse* for his brief discussion of the moment of convergence of retrospective narration and the present moment of narration.

his absence and then death also served another purpose: Lucy can hide her ambition and success under his benevolence and in loyalty to him. She cannot be condemned as an ambitious, self-serving woman because she did these things for him.

In the last direct address to the reader, Lucy says;

M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox? Listen.

I commenced my school; I worked—I worked hard. I deemed myself the steward of his property, and determined, God willing, to render a good account. Pupils came—burghers at first—a higher class ere long. . . . My externat became a pensionnat; that also prospered.

The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart. The spring which moved my energies lay far away beyond seas, in an Indian isle. (493-494)

Lucy reveals her success here, first in establishing an externat—a day school, and then expanding to become a pensionnat. Her clientele included the higher classes, and she “prospered.” But she cloaks this success first in her being the steward of M. Paul’s property and then as merely circumstantial. But other characters in the novel, especially Madame Beck, have proven that this kind of success is not merely circumstantial.

After her forced theatrical performance, Lucy says of herself,

I had accepted a part to please another: ere long, warming, becoming interested, taking courage, I acted to please myself. . . . though glad that I had obliged M. Paul, and tried my own strength for once, I took a firm resolution never to be drawn into a similar affair. A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by, and fastened them in with the lock of resolution which neither Time nor Temptation has since picked. (141)

But the lock clearly was picked. The autobiographic act is the exercise of her faculty for dramatic expression. In writing it, and in her professional success, she proves that she is not “a mere looker-on at life.” Even while professing to tamp down her ambitions and talents, Lucy here reveals them. Likewise, the many instances of circumnarration, while professing what Lucy is *not*, clearly demonstrate that she has, in fact, acted to please herself so skillfully that she has managed to obtain a position of autonomy and power as directress and writer.

“‘The business of a woman’s life’:
Concluding Thoughts on Professionalization
in Brontë’s Novels and in Her Life”

In 1837, while she was still a young writer, Charlotte Brontë wrote a letter to Poet Laureate Robert Southey asking for literary advice. His response profoundly affected her, though certainly not in the way that he intended. On March 12, he wrote:

The daydreams in [which] you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind, & in proportion as all the ‘ordinary uses of the world’ seem to you ‘flat & unprofitable’, you will be unfitted for them, without becoming fitted for anything else. Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life: & it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment & a recreation. (Smith, *Letters I* 166-167)

Her response on 16 March 1837 stated that “I could not help writing, partly to tell you how thankful I am for your kindness, and partly to let you know that your advice shall not be wasted; however sorrowfully and reluctantly it may be at first followed” (Smith, *Letters I* 169). And she did follow his advice in many ways. She said in her letter to him,

You do not forbid me to write; you do not say that what I write is utterly destitute of merit. You only warn me against the folly of neglecting real duties, for the sake of imaginative pleasures; of writing

for the love of fame; for the selfish excitement of emulation. You kindly allow me to write poetry for its own sake, provided I leave undone nothing which I ought to do, in order to pursue that single absorbing exquisite gratification. . . . I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfill, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself. . . . I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print; if the wish should rise, I'll look at Southey's letter, and suppress it. (Smith, *Letters I* 168-169)

When she publishes her work, she does so not as Charlotte Brontë, but as the androgynous Currer Bell.

Although Charlotte hated her own experiences as a teacher and a governess, she defended it as a profession and occupation. In several letters to W.S. Williams, she discussed the professional possibilities for his daughters. She encourages him to support his daughter Louisa's chance of attending Queen's College, saying,

it is a step towards independency—and one great curse of a single female life is to its dependency. . . . Your daughters—no more than your sons—should be a burden on your hands: your daughters—as much as your sons—should aim at making their way honourably through life. Do not wish to keep them at home. Believe me—teachers may be hard-worked, ill-paid and despised—but the girl who

stays at home doing nothing is worse off than the hardest-wrought and worst paid drudge of a school. (Smith, *Letters II* 226).

Here, Brontë argued for the benefits of work, even in a non-empowered profession. Brontë and her siblings had their share of terrible experiences as teachers and governesses, yet she still endorses the need for a woman to have an occupation, even if it is not an ideal situation.

It is no surprise that Brontë chose teaching and writing as the professions through which she empowered her heroines, and that the heroines struggle to balance professions and relationships. Brontë herself, as a professional, struggled throughout her life to balance her writing and her obligations to her family, and she and her sisters wanted to start their own school where they could escape the maltreatment they suffered as governesses. Brontë's heroines are not autobiographical, but the constant negotiation between work and relationships faced by her heroines is an echo of the reality for any nineteenth-century professional woman. In Brontë's own life, teaching was a burden that distracted her from writing. Even after she became successful as a writer, caring for her father, brother and sisters, and grief over the death of her siblings interfered with her work. Shortly after *Villette* was published, Brontë herself married. She never completed *Emma*, the book she started seven months before her marriage. During her marriage, she wrote nothing more than letters, and even those were under the threat of her husband's censorship. In a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey on October 31, 1854, Brontë wrote:

Aurthur complains that you do not distinctly promise to burn my letters as you receive them. He says you must give him a plain pledge to that effect—or he will read every line I write and elect himself censor of our correspondence. . . . Write him out his promise on a separate slip of paper, in a legible hand—and send it in your next.

(Smith, *Letters III* 296-297).

Even after her death, Brontë's husband Arthur Nicholls continued censoring her work. He and Brontë's father edited out parts of *The Professor* before its posthumous publication.

Brontë was a woman who was compelled to write, and treated writing as a profession, separate from her personal life. But she was also a woman who valued companionship. It makes sense that such a woman—one who was familiar with the financial and social restrictions on the professional woman—would write novels that explore the tension between autonomy and relationships. Perhaps Brontë never resolved the social/professional conflict herself, but her art continues to inspire men and women to think and to write.

Like Lucy Snowe, Brontë sought to protect herself with a façade. Even after the publication of *Jane Eyre*, when rumors of her identity as the author were circulating, Brontë told Ellen Nussey, one of her close friends, “[if anyone should] ask you what ‘novel’ Miss Brontë has been ‘publishing,’—you can just say . . . that you are authorized by Miss Brontë to say that she repels and disowns every accusation of the kind. You may add, if you please, that if any one has her

confidence, you believe you have” (Smith, *Letters II* 62). Brontë was careful to separate her professional self from her personal, feminine self. Like Shirley, Brontë used masculine pronouns when referring to herself to her publishers in business transactions. In fact, Brontë did not reveal herself to her publishers in person until she and her sisters needed to challenge the allegation made in the press by Anne and Emily’s publisher that Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell were all the same person. By this time, *Jane Eyre* was already in its 3rd edition. Even after the meeting, Charlotte would occasionally revert to discussing herself as Currer Bell and using masculine pronouns when discussing business, especially if it also involved her sisters.⁶³ Like Rochester, Brontë’s father could not see to read her writing, especially since the Brontë children wrote in incredibly small print. Brontë’s writing was her secret world, a world where she afforded women professional autonomy even while feeling the restrictions of nineteenth-century society on her own autonomy. Perhaps an implied narrative of Charlotte Brontë’s own professional struggle can be traced through the stories of her heroines.

Brontë clearly recognized that there is no easy solution to the conflict between relationships and professions. In her fiction, as in her life, she continually struggled with the tension between the two, offering no resolution, only varying attempts to present a viable relationship that still allowed for autonomous professional work.

Brontë’s presentation of the struggle becomes more difficult to resolve in each

⁶³ See, for example, her letter to W. S. Williams in early September 1849 when the sisters’ poetry collection (Smith, *II* 113) was being reprinted. Emily Brontë was even more fastidious than Charlotte about retaining the androgynous pseudonym, and the character Shirley was based in part on Emily.

subsequent novel, offering more restrictions on a woman's professional space after marriage, until she ends *Villette* by avoiding marriage altogether. The *Professor* ends with Frances enjoying professional autonomy in a position for which she has openly negotiated with her husband, even though this professional success is tempered by the need for her to overemphasize her domestic subservience in order to have the professional autonomy. Jane ends *Jane Eyre* with a profession that her husband does not know about since he is almost blind and, like Brontë's father who could not read her writing, cannot read Jane's book. So she has professional autonomy, but it is done in isolation from her relationship. In *Shirley*, Shirley must give up all legal and some actual control of her estate and business when she marries, and although Caroline will be starting a day school with Shirley after she is married, this is a limited profession with shared autonomy. In *Villette*, Lucy ends the novel with full professional and personal autonomy, but without a partner.

I began this dissertation with Brontë professing to W.S. Williams the desire to deal with "the 'condition of women' question" (Smith, *Letters II* 66). Women's lack of professional options and opportunities was an issue that garnered Brontë's personal and authorial attention. As a woman who herself endured harsh treatment as a governess and suffered from boredom and depression as a teacher before becoming a successful author, Brontë understood the difficulties and limitations a professional woman faced. As a daughter, sister, friend, and wife, she understood the social restrictions and responsibilities of a nineteenth-century woman who wants to have a profession while retaining social ties. In Brontë's letter to Williams, she claims

that “the Sufferer is free—is entitled—at last to send up to Heaven any piercing cry for relief—if by that cry he can hope to obtain succour” (Smith, *Letters II* 66). Brontë sends this “piercing cry for relief” in her novels, where her heroines cry out for, and obtain, professional autonomy.

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