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Sound, Silence, and Listening in the Novels of the Brontës

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the representations of sound, silence, and listening in the novels of the Brontë sisters, situating them within the emerging field of literary sound studies and addressing a notable gap in Brontë scholarship. Drawing on close reading and historical contextualisation, it examines how Charlotte, Emily and Anne deploy sonic elements and sonic-related actions not only as narrative devices but also as means of articulating power, gender, and interiority.

Chapter One focuses on *Wuthering Heights*, and analyses how Emily Brontë uses sound as a narrative; by establishing a soundscape of interconnected and interchangeable sounds – between natural sounds and human voices, meaningful language and meaningless noises – spatial and temporal boundaries are challenged, pointing towards Emily's vision of a world towards unity over division. Chapter Two turns to Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, highlighting her concern with silence in both genders. Through written (letters, diaries) and oral (gossip, overheard conversations) language, Anne interrogates silence and seeks complicated narrative and structural strategies to provide a possible solution to it. Chapter Three examines Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where silence becomes both a site of oppression and self-assertion. Through key figures such as Helen Burns, Bertha Mason, St John Rivers, and Edward Rochester, Charlotte Brontë maps Jane's acquisition of power and interiority via strategic silence. Chapter Four reads Charlotte's *Villette* through the lens of surveillance and eavesdropping, which function not merely as narrative devices but as central themes intertwined with silence found both in characters and in structure. Through the ghostly nun and bilingual narrative strategies, the author explores how silence and surveillance shape the protagonist's search for interiority and position within a linguistically fragmented world constantly being over-watched. Chapter Five centres on Charlotte's *Shirley*, and discusses how listening works as a secondary action in the novel. It reveals social hierarchies and gendered forms of attention, particularly through working-class women and the ambivalent figure of the unheard listener.

By tracing Brontë sisters' distinct yet intersecting sonic aesthetics, this study argues for a re-evaluation of the auditory as a critical mode of narrative meaning and social engagement. Sound, silence, and listening function not only as significant thematic and structural elements in the works of the Brontë sisters, but also – as explored through their novels – offer a lens through which to reflect broader anxieties and desires surrounding voice, agency, and relational presence in the 1830-1850s English novels.

Lay Summary

This thesis examines the ways in which the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, used sound, silence, and listening in their novels. While many studies have focused on the Brontës' lives or the historical setting of their works, this research instead pays close attention to how they used voices, noises, silences, and the act of listening to shape stories and explore emotions, gender, power, and relationships.

Each chapter examines a different novel, showing how sound works in its own way: Emily Brontë blends voices and natural sounds in *Wuthering Heights*; Anne Brontë explores silence and communication in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; Charlotte Brontë uses silence for both control and resistance in *Jane Eyre*, and later explores eavesdropping and surveillance in *Villette*. In *Shirley*, listening reveals the social divisions between classes and genders.

Together, these close readings reveal that sound is not just background noise; rather, it's central to how these novels express complex inner lives and social tensions. This study invites readers first to listen to the Brontës, then to hear both the differences and connections within their sonic worlds, and finally, to think more broadly about how sound shapes meaning in nineteenth-century fiction.

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Introduction

This thesis investigates the presence and function of sound, silence, and listening in the novels of the Brontë sisters. Anyone who reads their fiction cannot fail to notice the prevalence of sonic information: the wuthering wind blowing down the moor in Emily's *Wuthering Heights*; the frequent whispers of gossip surrounding Helen Graham in Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; or the mysterious, disembodied calls exchanged between Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester at the climax of Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. The Brontës' novels are saturated with sound in its many forms. Alongside it, there is also silence, its necessary counterpart, and an array of listening acts, often rendered with extraordinary narrative care. In placing their characters within a world of sounds and silences, of listening and being listened to, the Brontës also draw the reader into that same condition. What are the sounds? What kinds of silences are constructed? Who is listening, and in what way? Above all, why do all three Brontë sisters return so insistently to these sonic and auditory dynamics? These are the questions that give rise to the present study.

1. Brontë Scholarship Overview and Thesis Approach

To this day, the Brontë sisters' novels continue to attract a wide readership, and scholarly interest in their work shows no sign of diminishing. Since the publication of Elizabeth Gaskell's foundational *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* in 1857, Brontë scholarship has, for a significant period, been shaped primarily by biographical approaches. The impulse to write the lives of the Brontës has remained constant. Among the most notable biographers is

Winifred Gérin, who between 1959 and 1971 published individual biographies of Anne, Branwell, Charlotte, and Emily.[1] Several decades later, Juliet Barker's influential group biography *The Brontës* (1994), grounded in a vast body of factual data, sought to dismantle many of the myths established by previous biographers, especially Gaskell. However, as critics have noted, it also introduced new distortions, particularly in the representation of Charlotte.[2] Lucasta Miller approached the subject in *The Brontë Myth* (2001), where she systematically debunked many of the myths perpetuated by earlier biographical accounts, including those of Gaskell and Barker. As Deborah Denenholz Morse and Diane Long Hoeveler succinctly state in the introduction to their edited collection *A Companion to the Brontës* (2016), 'Brontë Studies have always been rooted in biography and located in a particular place, the Yorkshire moors' (1).

Since the 1980s, and increasingly in the twenty-first century, Brontë scholarship has gradually moved beyond its longstanding biographical foundations, engaging instead with a wider range of socio-political and cultural frameworks. These include Marxism, feminism, postcolonial theory, as well as studies of religion, art, illness and the body. Terry Eagleton's *Myths of Power* (1975/2005) offers a Marxist reading of all seven Brontë novels, with particular attention to Charlotte; he situates her politics of class in relation to her views on religion, aesthetics, and gender. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979/2000) provides an early and influential feminist reading of both Charlotte's and

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[1] Lucasta Miller describes Gérin's work as a combination of enthusiasm and rigour, noting that her portrayal of Charlotte, which was based on extensive documentary evidence, effectively challenged 'the semi-fictional role [Charlotte] had come to play in the collective imagination' (Miller 151).

[2] See Miller 167-8.

Emily's fiction, placing them within a wider tradition of nineteenth-century women's writing and establishing a gender criticism framework. Prompted in part by Jean Rhys's 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which gives narrative voice to Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and imagines her Jamaican past, a growing body of scholarship has addressed issues of colonialism, race, and slave trade in the novels of the Brontë sisters.[3] In the field of religious cultural studies, Marianne Thormählen's *The Brontës and Religion* (1999) presents the first full-length study of religion in the sisters' fiction, demonstrating how their engagement with contemporary debates on doctrinal, ethical and ecclesiastical issues shaped the religious dimensions of their novels.[4] In the arts and media domain, Sandra Hagan and Juliette Wells's edited volume *The Brontës in the World of the Arts* (2008) explores the siblings' artistic production and their representations of the arts in relation to visual, musical, theatrical, and material cultures.[5] A further wave of recent scholarship concerns the representation of mental and physical illness in the Brontës' works. In *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (1996), Sally Shuttleworth situates Charlotte's fiction within mid-nineteenth-century psychological and medical discourse, offering a historically grounded analysis of her representations of sexuality, insanity, and surveillance. Less than a decade later, Beth Torgerson's *Reading the Brontë Body* (2005) produced the first full-length study of all three sisters' works in light of

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[3] Notably, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' (1985) published on *Critical Inquiry* initiated the first postcolonial reading of *Jane Eyre*. Susan L. Meyer's *Victorian Studies* essay 'Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of "Jane Eyre"' (1990) explored Charlotte's complex use of racial metaphor. In 1995, Maja-Lisa von Sneidern's *ELH* article '*Wuthering Heights* and the Liverpool Slave Trade' proposed a postcolonial reading of Emily's novel, discussing Heathcliff's possible identity as a victim of slave trade.

[4] More recently, Simon Marsden's *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (2014) offers a complementary perspective, portraying Emily as a religiously ambivalent figure, both heretical and spiritually sincere, whose unconventional faith resists institutional Christianity while remaining deeply attuned to the divine.

[5] Partly building on this work, Amber K. Regis and Deborah Wynne's edited collection *The Edinburgh Companion to the Brontës and the Arts* (2024) offers an inclusive, interdisciplinary reassessment of the Brontës' relationship to the arts through an even broader range of chapters, highlighting both their creative practices and their afterlives across heritage, adaptation, and artistic reinterpretation.

Victorian medical knowledge, combining literary analysis with medical history and anthropology to examine their literary representations of illness and contagion.

While the second half of the twentieth century and beyond has seen a diversification in Brontë scholarship, moving increasingly away from strictly biographical inquiry and towards a wide range of critical directions, many of these developments remain closely tied to biographical, historical, and contextualised approaches. The association between the sisters' works and their lives continues to operate as an implicit premise across much of the criticism. This tendency is evident in more recent collections, which often adopt a comprehensive approach to the Brontës, foregrounding biographical detail, geographical setting, and historical context, such as *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës* (2002), edited by Heather Glen, and the 2016 *Companion* co-edited by Morse and Hoeveler. Broadly speaking, from the earliest accounts in the mid-nineteenth century to the critical work of recent decades, scholarly energy has often been channelled into interpreting the Brontës' writings through the lens of their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, geographical locations, or social milieus.

The present thesis, however, offers an alternative emphasis. Rather than adhering strictly to contextual or historical readings, it adopts a relatively decontextualised perspective that privileges the formal and narrative techniques the sisters employed as professional novelists. This is not to suggest that social or historical concerns expressed in the novels will be disregarded; indeed, these concerns are inseparable from the texts and from the reading experience. For example, this thesis will consider the linkage between the popular fairy image with contemporary childhood death illustrated in *Wuthering Heights*, the toxic Regency ethos of the masculine detailed in *The Tenant*, the plight of the nineteenth-century governess depicted in *Jane Eyre*, the tensions between British and continental French culture touched upon in *Villette*, and the Luddite riots discussed in *Shirley*. Nonetheless, it also acknowledges a crucial and often overlooked fact, that the novels of the Brontë sisters are all set in the recent past, roughly two generations back from the time of publication.[6] As Thormählen notes in her essay 'The Brontë Novels as Historical Fiction', the sisters' use of backdating stems partly from a desire to depict a more convincingly remote and uncivilised northern landscape, and partly from a broader literary convention of the early nineteenth century. One notable example is Walter Scott, who had a profound influence on the Brontës; his novel *Waverley* (1814) bears the full title *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*. As Kathleen Tillotson also observes in *The Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (1954), a common setting for nineteenth-century fiction 'lay in a period from twenty to sixty years earlier' (92). This practice is evident in the Brontës' juvenilia and continues into the novels discussed in this thesis. At the same time, however, although the Brontë novels adopt a temporal framework that looks to the past, the phenomena and issues they address are predominantly contemporary. This endows the novels with a quality of temporal dissonance, which is subtle yet significant, and is detected even in *Wuthering Heights*, which, though set in an earlier period, does not engage with specific historical events. As Jerome de Groot writes in the introduction to *The Historical Novel* (2009), '[the] historical novelist similarly explores the dissonance and displacement between then and now, making the past recognisable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar' (3).[7]

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[6] Among the five novels to be discussed in the thesis, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* provide definite dates in their respective opening, 1801 and 1827; *Shirley* is set against the backdrop of the Yorkshire Luddite riots, which firmly situates the main plot of the novel between 1811 and 1812. The time-frame of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* is somewhat ambivalent, but the narrative itself – framed as a retrospective autobiography – positions the main events at least a decade (*Jane Eyre*) or several decades (*Villette*) prior to the time of narration.

Admittedly, this defamiliarising process, where the past and present collide to create displacement and dissonance, adds a layer of complexity to the texture of the text. Contextual readings, therefore, are not only valid but have long served as a dominant critical mode, as the preceding overview of Brontë scholarship has shown. Yet, when we consider the most immediate and primal interaction between reader and text, and between reader and author, contextual readings may not always offer the most direct route into the fabric of the work. Even a reader unfamiliar with the historical context of the Brontës – their personal lives, their cultural background, their religious affiliations, and their political commitments – can intuit the central tensions that animate their novels: the tension between the human and the natural in *Wuthering Heights*; the condition of professional women in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Jane Eyre*; the confusion and construction of selfhood in *Villette*; or the intersection of gender and class in *Shirley*. These concerns arise not solely from historical specificity but from the novels' intrinsic design. The reader is able to grasp the world of the novels through a clear and comprehensible setting that is part of the text *per se*. This setting may, as in *Shirley* or *Villette*, be marked by identifiable historical or cultural referents, or it may take the form of a more marginal, insular locality, as in *Wuthering Heights*. In either case, it is through the interplay of characters and narrative development within these constructed settings that the reader comes to feel the core concerns, arguments, and emotional intensities the authors set out to explore. While critics have long debated the precise nature of these concerns – their meanings, modes of expression, and even the authors' intended messages – there has persisted, for nearly two centuries, a shared understanding, at least to some extent, among general readers and scholars alike as to what these novels are about. This partial consensus owes much to the Brontës' ability to give clear and deliberate shape to their thematic concerns – an act that lies at the heart of their novelistic craft.

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[7] Although this discussion draws on concepts related to the historical novel, the Brontë sisters' works are generally not considered part of that genre. Here it is only to point out that they share the practice of backdating with the historical novel. Thormählen's use of the term 'historical fiction' in her essay refers specifically to this tendency toward backdating (276). In *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, Avrom Fleishman defines the historical novel as one in which fictional characters inhabit the same world as actual historical figures, with at least one such figure explicitly referred to in the text, see Fleishman 3-4. By this definition, *Shirley* is the only Brontë novel that qualifies as a historical novel. However, as Chapter Five of this thesis will argue, even *Shirley*'s status as a historical novel remains contested.

Therefore, it is on this basis – that the novels continue to be read, felt, and interpreted some two hundred years later – that this study centres its attention on the Brontë sisters' status as professional writers, that is, skilled artisans of fiction who selected, refined, and structured their material with artistic intention. As Glen has noted, even in their juvenilia, the encompassing sagas of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal, the sisters were experimenting with techniques such as multiple narrative voices, and the outcome was 'not autobiographical outpourings but […] sophisticated works of art' (3). Likewise, their 'sophisticated use of a variety of narrative personae, their play with different voices and narrative points of view' in their later novels mark the craft of these fictional texts, and warn against any effort to interpret them as thinly veiled personal narratives (4). Multiple scholars have examined Charlotte's and Emily's manuscripts, revealing a high degree of compositional control: revisions were rarely incidental, and often served specific narrative functions. Early efforts include G. D. Hargreaves's overview 'The Poems of Ellis Bell: The Version Printed in 1846 and the Manuscript Version' (1994) which focuses on manuscripts of 26 of Emily's poems, and Margaret Smith's 'The Manuscripts of Charlotte Brontë's Novels' (1983), which touches upon manuscripts of Charlotte's all four novels. Ileana Marin devotes two consecutive 2013 essays 'Charlotte Brontë's Heron Scissors: Cancellations and Excisions in the Manuscript of Shirley' and 'Charlotte Brontë's Busy Scissors Revising Villette' to tracing Charlotte's emendations and cancellations in her manuscripts, noting how an increasing number of these textual changes from *Jane Eyre* to *Villette* indicate an increasing level of authorial control of her texts. Lucy A. Hanks in her 2020 doctoral dissertation *'Read It through My Marks' : Revision and Female Authorship in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century* examined the manuscript of *Villette* in detail, and explored how Charlotte revised her text with clear intention, making emendations and excisions in order to create meaning through the ambivalent silence of Lucy Snowe.

It follows, then, that biographical and contextual elements in the novels of Brontë sisters, though undeniable, should be more appropriately regarded as material for creation, subject to modification or distortion in accordance with the author's specific artistic purpose. They are the raw ingredients from which a consciously shaped literary product emerges. This thesis is based on the awareness that the sisters were, from a young age, avid readers and writers, producing narrative poems, stories, and eventually full-length novels. By the time they composed the works examined in this thesis, they had arrived at a measure of technical maturity. This is not to claim that they achieved perfection or full realisation of authorial intent in these novels. Rather, it is to suggest that the tensions, gaps, and apparent inconsistencies within these texts, such as the structural sprawl of *Shirley*, or the seemingly disruptive insertion of Helen's diary in *The Tenant*, are deliberate compositional strategies rather than accidents of form. Meaning arises not despite these dissonances, but through them.

The central focus of this thesis is thus not simply what the Brontës wrote, but how they wrote it. It examines the ways in which their narrative choices, stylistic devices, and lexical decisions enabled them to convey complex aesthetic, ethical, and emotional concerns. The chosen point of entry into these narrative strategies is their handling of sound, silence, and listening – three interrelated elements that, though having received relatively little attention in Brontë criticism, serve as powerful organising principles in their work.

2. The Rise of Literary Sound Studies

Sound studies emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, and rapidly developed into a vibrant inter-disciplinary domain at the turn of the century. One of the earliest and most influential works in this area is R. Murray Schafer's *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977), which introduced the term 'soundscape' to describe 'any portion of the sonic environment regarded as a field for study'; Schafer envisioned soundscape studies as a wide-ranging cross-disciplinary field that would occupy 'the middle ground between science, society, and the arts' (274, 4). Among other foundational texts, Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003) traced the cultural and technological origins of modern sound reproduction, including an exploration of nineteenth-century British scientific, technological, and cultural engagements with sound. More recent works have continued to shape the field's theoretical contours. *Keywords in Sound* (2015), edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, organises twenty key terms – body, image, music, space, etc. – that reflect the diverse concerns of sound studies. Meanwhile, *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies* (2018), edited by Michael Bull, offers a comprehensive interdisciplinary overview of sound's cultural, political, and epistemological significance, highlighting its role across media, identity, and experience, while outlining future directions for the field.

Despite the breadth of sound studies – despite its occupation of the middle ground between scientific, social, and artistic studies – the relationship between literature and sound has often remained underexplored. Notably, *Keywords* does not devote sustained attention to literature as a distinct subfield, and of the 38 essays in *The Routledge Companion*, only one of them, Justin St. Clair's 'Literature and Sound', touches upon this subfield (353-61). A turning point in this field came with Garrett Stewart's *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (1990), the first study to examine the inextricable relationship between written text and vocal sounds. Through phonemic readings of texts ranging from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Woolf and Joyce, Stewart demonstrates that sound, as the material foundation of language, is not merely adjacent to but integral to literary expression and form. Following Stewart's intervention, a growing body of scholarship has explored the intimate connection between literature and sound-related concepts and phenomena. John M. Picker's *Victorian*

Soundscapes (2003) builds on Schafer's notion of the soundscape to reopen the complex acoustic culture of the nineteenth century, tracing how scientific and literary figures reimagined sound, silence, and voice during a period of intense auditory transformation; this approach is exemplified by his readings of works by Dickens, George Eliot, Tennyson, Stoker, and Conrad. Extending this inquiry into the early twentieth century, Patricia Pye's *Sound and Modernity in the Literature of London, 1880-1918* (2017) investigates how late Victorian and early Edwardian authors, including Conrad, Doyle, Ford, and Gissing, represented London's evolving soundscape and articulated broader tensions between sound, urban experience, and modernity. In the past decade, literary sound studies have continued to grow in range and methodological ambition. Angela Leighton's *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (2018) focuses on the literary representation of auditory perception in poetry from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. Anna Snaith's edited collection *Sound and Literature* (2020) brings together leading scholars in the field, framing literature as an active site of sonic energy and advancing the field through new methodologies for reading, theorising, and listening to sound in texts. Most recently, *The Edinburgh Companion to Literature and Sound Studies* (2024), edited by Helen Groth and Julian Murphet, gathers newly commissioned research to explore the sonic dimensions of writing and the literary potential of sound, positioning literature not as a marginal concern but as a vital framework through which sound itself may be theorised.

Despite the growing body of scholarship in literary sound studies, many areas of this field have yet to be thoroughly examined. One noticeable limitation is that most existing studies concentrate on literary texts from the late nineteenth century onwards. As Sterne has pointed out, scientific interest in human auditory perception and the physical properties of sound began in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century and gradually evolved into an independent discipline (2, 51). Meanwhile, by the early decades of the nineteenth century, industrial technologies, most notably the railway, had begun to reshape the acoustic environment of everyday life (Picker 4). Yet it was not until the invention of new sound technologies and media for reproduction that the experience and conceptualisation of sound underwent a fundamental transformation.[8] These conceptual and technological shifts have found pronounced expression in modernist and postmodernist literature. Therefore, it is reasonable that recent works, such as *Sound and Literature* and *The Edinburgh Companion*, have focused on texts from these periods, which often exhibit a heightened meta-awareness of sound as both theme and textual device (Snaith 1-2, Groth and Murphet 6-7).

In comparison, literary sound studies on earlier works, especially from the first half of the nineteenth century and before, remain far more scattered and limited in scope. Charles Dickens and Gaskell have received some attention in this regard: Schafer briefly cites *Hard Times* (1854) in his construction of an industrial-era soundscape, drawing on Dickens's descriptions of machine noise (75). Picker, in the first chapter of *Victorian Soundscapes*, provides a detailed reading of *Dombey and Son* (1848), showing how Dickens mobilises soundscape as both theme and narrative strategy to express his desire for authorial audibility within the noisy industrial modernity (15-40). In his article '"You Say You Want a Revolution": Dialectical Soundscapes in Gaskell's "North and South"' (2012), Mark Celeste highlights the central narrative role of sound, showing how Gaskell employs patterned soundscapes to deepen her critique of class divisions in *North and South* (1855). Martin Willis in his 2024 essay 'Therapeutic Soundscapes in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction' considers how *North and South* and *Cousin Phillis* (1864) record particular natural soundscapes, and how Gaskell identifies natural sound as a source of both physical and psychological restoration. Other scattered studies focus primarily on representations of music, or more broadly on poetry due to the lyrical formal proximity to musical rhythm. *The Edinburgh Companion* includes examples such as David Toop's analysis of the role of musical performance and musical language in Jane Austen's novels (45-58), and Miranda Stanyon's reading of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* as a site of musical marginalisation within both literary and sound studies (99-114). Other works take Romantic poetry as their central concern due to the significance of music and sound in Romantic ideas, and examine the intersection of sound, music, and poetic form. Some of the volumes focusing upon this aspect include John Hollander's early pamphlet *Images of Voice: Music and Sound in Romantic Poetry* (1970), James H. Donelan's *Poetry and the Romantic Musical Aesthetic* (2008), and Yimon Lo's *Musical Wordsworth: Romantic Soundscape and Harmony* (2023), engaging poets including Hölderlin, Wordsworth, and Coleridge.

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[8] The first major turning point was the invention of the phonograph in 1877, which disrupted the long-standing assumption of sound as inherently transient and ushered in new ways of preserving, transmitting, and interacting with sonic material. Over the next century, technologies such as radio broadcasting, audiobooks, and MP3 files continued to reshape how sound was experienced and how its relation to textuality was understood.

In the field of Brontë studies – the focus of this thesis – a similar situation prevails: research on sound and acoustics in their novels is limited and dispersed. Helen Groth's chapter ‘Charlotte Brontë and the Listening Reader’, included in the collection *The Brontës and the Idea of the Human* (2019), offers one of the few sustained engagements with this topic. Groth explores the sonic dimensions of *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, and selected poetry from Charlotte, showing how she uses literary soundscapes to train her readers in a kind of attentiveness oriented toward interiority, silence, and the unfamiliar, thus linking acts of listening to ethical responsiveness, cognitive boundaries, and the imaginative education of the self (107-24). Phonemic readings have also been applied to some of the Brontë texts: Sterne provides a brief examination of how Charlotte Brontë plays with the sounds of letters in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, using them as unconscious expressions of the heroines’ mental states (194-6); Jeremy Cott’s ‘Structures of Sound: The Last Sentence of *Wuthering Heights*’ (1964) offers an extremely detailed phonetic and syntactic analysis of the novel’s final paragraph, suggesting that its divergence from Emily Brontë’s usual prose style marks it as a poetic elegy on both lexical and sonic levels. By contrast, discussions of speech and silence in the Brontë corpus are both extensive and well-established, with influential works such as *The Madwoman in the Attic* offering foundational feminist readings related to the suppressed voice and its expression. The sheer volume of this scholarship makes it impossible to summarise here, and relevant contributions will be addressed throughout the main chapters of this thesis.[9] However, most of these studies are situated within socio-historical frameworks and tend to approach the Brontës’ treatment of voice and silence through feminist perspectives, focusing on themes such as female voice, authorship, and gendered silence. While such research does engage with the textual strategies used to represent silence or voice, it rarely does so in sustained depth. Moreover, these discussions typically do not conceptualise 'sound' in a broader sense, nor do they situate speech and silence within a more integrated sonic framework such as that of the soundscape.

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[9] See, for example, Janet H. Freeman’s ‘Speech and Silence in *Jane Eyre*’ (1984); Ivan Kreilkamp’s ‘Unuttered: Withheld Speech and Female Authorship in “Jane Eyre” and “Villette”’ (1999), which was later included in his volume *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (2005); Elizabeth Langland’s book chapter ‘Dialogue and Narrative Transgression in Anne Brontë’s *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, which is part of her volume *Telling tales: gender and narrative form in Victorian literature and culture* (2002); Kristen Pond’s ‘The Ethics of Silence in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*’ (2017).

This is precisely where the present thesis intervenes: by examining the Brontë sisters' novels through a sonic lens that accounts for the diverse manifestations of sound, silence, and listening, and analysing how these elements are intricately woven into the structure of the narrative, style, and language. The aim is to uncover a complex, often hidden, sonic architecture, one that constitutes a way of perceiving and expressing the world. Although the Brontës were writing in the same era as Dickens, their novels rarely depict industrial noise in any direct or concrete form. Even *Shirley*, which directly addresses the Luddite uprisings, largely omits references to the auditory effects of the mill. In a sense, their novels may seem acoustically unmarked when compared to the urban-industrial soundscapes of Dickens or his contemporaries. Yet their soundscapes are neither wholly natural nor primitively pre-modern; they are neither confined to wilderness nor domestic interiors, neither strictly to middle-class parlours nor upper-class mansions. The soundscapes in the Brontë sisters' novels may at first appear broadly universal, lacking clear focalisation or specificity. However, as previously discussed, their works are undeniably rooted in the historical conditions of their time, and thus their sonic worlds must also bear certain culturally and temporally specific features, which, should be detectable from the text alone. At the same time, the novels consistently foreground phenomena and actions such as sound, silence, and listening, suggesting an implicit thematic emphasis. This apparent contradiction – between the diffuseness of the soundscape and the concentrated attention to auditory experience – forms a central tension that this thesis seeks to investigate. To make sense of this paradox, this thesis adopts a critical method that is situated between contextualised and decontextualised approaches. While historical and cultural contexts are consulted, the primary method employed here are close readings, because the sonic features of these texts often suggest a logic and resonance that exceed their immediate historical circumstances, which can be best understood via close attention to the text.

In addition to the apparent contradictions outlined above, that the Brontës' soundscapes being at once historically rooted and seemingly universal, thematically dispersed yet sonically focused, this thesis also examines a deeper and more inherent tension: the paradoxical relationship between sound and literary language itself. As critics such as St. Clair have observed, the literary representation of sound is marked by an intrinsic dislocation. St. Clair describes this as a 'fundamentally dislocatory' relation, in which the sonic reference is always deferred or displaced: 'the "there" of textuality is necessarily at a remove from whatever soundscape a specific passage records […] Literature, in other words, is inherently acousmatic' (355). Similarly, Schafer notes that 'all visual projections of sound are arbitrary and fictitious' (127). What emerges from such claims is a view of literary sound not as a mimetic reproduction, but as a structurally self-conscious displacement, one that foregrounds the gap between sonic experience and written representation. This dislocation is distinct from the kind of temporal dissonance discussed earlier in relation to the Brontës' use of backdating in their novels, wherein contemporary anxieties are projected back into past settings. That form of dissonance relies on extra-textual historical knowledge to be perceived and analysed. By contrast, the paradoxical tension between sound and text is inherent to the medium of writing itself; it requires no historical context to be felt. Furthermore, this paradoxical structure applies not only to moments when sound is explicitly evoked, but also to representations of silence, where the act of writing about silence similarly enacts a complex displacement. These layered dissonances render the sonic dimensions of the Brontës' fiction richer and formally more intricate, revealing a set of narrative tensions that have yet to be fully addressed in scholarship. This thesis aims to fill that critical gap.

3. Choice of Text, A Note on Terminology, and Outline of Chapters

A brief clarification is needed regarding the selection of primary texts. Across their lifetimes, the three Brontë sisters collectively authored seven completed novels, here listed in the order of publication: *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Agnes Grey* (1847), *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), *Shirley* (1849), *Villette* (1853), and *The Professor*, which was written by Charlotte in 1846 but published posthumously in 1857. This dissertation focuses on five of these novels, excluding Anne's first novel *Agnes Grey* and Charlotte's *The Professor*. The decision is based primarily on the fact that these two works share thematic and generic similarities with *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Villette*, respectively, while the latter two demonstrate a more complex and varied use of narrative technique and stylistic experimentation. As such, they provide a richer textual space for the representation of sound, silence, and listening. This is not to suggest that *Agnes Grey* and *The Professor* are inherently immature or lacking in merit, but rather that they offer less insight into the two authors' sustained interest in the sonic world.

The chapters are arranged according to the three key terms in the thesis title: sound, silence, and listening, and under the overarching sonic space of the soundscape. It will be helpful to provide definitions of these key terms at this point. The term 'soundscape', as used here, follows the definitions offered by Schafer and Picker, referring to the general sonic environment evoked within a novelistic text. The term 'sound' is taken in its broadest sense, encompassing both natural and human-produced sounds. Within the category of human sound, both meaningful language and meaningless noise are included. It should be noted, however, that the determination of 'meaningfulness' is context-dependent, an issue particularly examined in Chapters One and Three.

The notion of 'silence' in this dissertation is multifaceted and context-sensitive. It may denote the physical absence of sound in the environment or a character's non-verbal state, which can be either voluntary or imposed, and which can be indicative of either disempowerment or authority. Silence can also refer to failed communication: when a speaker's voice is unheard, misunderstood, or ignored, silence emerges not from absence but from unsuccessful transmission. At times, silence signifies the textual quality of written language, namely, its contrast to the spoken word. Elsewhere, it designates narrative gaps deliberately created by the author or narrator. This dissertation examines silence not only at the diegetic level but also at the level of narration and reception, that is, between the author and the reader. These overlapping definitions and analytic layers constitute one of the focal points of this study.

The term ‘listening’ is employed throughout the dissertation in three modes: 1) legitimate, engaged listening within dialogue; 2) overhearing, or the accidental reception by an uninvolved party; and 3) eavesdropping, or the intentional, covert listening by an outsider. In discussing eavesdropping, this dissertation draws on Ann Gaylin’s *Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austen to Proust* (2003), which explores the practice as a narrative device that embodies human curiosity, mediates the flow of information, and dramatises the tension between privacy and publicity in nineteenth-century English and French fiction. This study adopts Gaylin’s definition of the term within an etymological framing: the term eavesdropping derives from the physical space beneath a house’s eaves, the ‘eavesdrop’, where one might unintentionally get wet while standing near but outside a private space. The meaning evolved from physical intrusion to metaphorical transgression: ‘the secret listening to the private conversation of others’ (2). Eavesdropping thus inherently marks and transgresses the boundary between public and private, situating the listener in a liminal space that dramatises spatial, psychological, and discursive trespass. Additionally, Gaylin highlights eavesdropping’s features (its interpretive nature due to fragmented access to information), motives (a ‘primal human curiosity’ for that which one ought not to know), and functions in narrative structure, which includes the notion of the reader as a special kind of eavesdropper who incurs no risk of being overheard (7-15). Chapters Two, Four, and Five build upon aspects of this theorisation. However, while Gaylin links the prevalence of eavesdropping in nineteenth-century fiction to contemporary anxieties, such an explanation does not adequately account for the texts examined in this dissertation. As Gaylin argues, these anxieties are rooted in the novel as a new medium – a 'literature of private life' and of 'snooping about' that transgresses privacy, as well as in the effects of rapid urbanisation, which compressed personal space, surrounded individuals with strangers, and fostered what she describes as 'the greater desire for and value of privacy' and the 'yearning for a private space free from inquisitive eyes and ears' (4-5). This dissertation contends, however, that the Brontë sisters' use of eavesdropping arises from a different set of concerns. This divergence highlights a key point raised at the end of the previous section: that the soundscapes in the Brontës' novels are, in some aspects, remarkably detached from the specific historical anxieties of their time.

The particular ordering of these three keywords in this thesis reflects an underlying conceptual logic: sound as a generative narrative presence; silence as its counterpart with a complex dynamic; and listening as the interpretive act that mediates between the two. Within this structure, Chapters Two to Four offer more nuanced distinctions between types of silence, further unpacking its narrative, thematic, and relational dimensions. Together, these chapters form a coherent framework for analysing the Brontë sisters' complex engagement with the sonic.

Chapter One explores the complex interplay of sound in *Wuthering Heights*, focusing on how various auditory elements – natural sounds, human voices, meaningful speech, and non-verbal noises – are presented as fluid and interchangeable. This instability of sonic categories collapses spatial and temporal boundaries, enabling connections between seemingly opposed realms such as past and present, dream and reality, and even life and death. The chapter argues that sound in the novel functions as a mode of narration in its own right, drawing on Romantic conceptions of sound and echoing a broader Romantic legacy that Emily Brontë had touched upon in her early poetry and reworked in her fiction. Through this sonic mode of storytelling, the novel not only constructs but simultaneously destabilises binary oppositions, pointing towards a deeper vision of reconciliation and harmony. In doing so, sound becomes a narrative principle that is both structural and philosophical, shaping the novel's affective and metaphysical dimensions.

Chapter Two challenges the prevailing view that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* mainly uses its striking narrative structure – especially Helen's diary – to represent a gendered experience of enforced female silence. While critical consensus links the novel's formal design to the heroine's inability to articulate her suffering within the bounds of Victorian decorum, this chapter argues that silence in *The Tenant* is both more pervasive and more complex. It is not only a thematic thread that runs through depictions of marriage, abuse, education, and emotional repression, but also a condition afflicting both women and men – albeit in different ways – resulting in the estrangement of individuals and the breakdown of communal ties. Anne Brontë not only explores the causes and consequences of this silence, but also proposes written and spoken language as partial remedies. Through a deliberately layered narrative composed of embedded letters, diaries, conversations, and gossip, the novel constructs a communicative structure designed to mend the rupture. Far from signalling fragmentation, this interaction of different written and oral language in the textual form enhances the novel's coherence. Ultimately, *The Tenant* advances a gender-relevant, rather than gendered, narrative model – one that seeks to reconnect isolated individuals and offer its message as a form of public engagement and moral intervention.

Chapter Three turns to *Jane Eyre* and examines silence not as a singular motif, but as a diffuse and mutable presence that permeates the novel in shifting and often contradictory forms. Unlike *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, where silence primarily signals a breakdown in interpersonal communication, here silence is less easily definable – appearing as both a source of constraint and a medium of power. Sometimes backgrounded, sometimes foregrounded, silence structures and punctuates the narrative's vocal and emotional rhythms: it may precede, accompany, or follow speech and sound, and at times holds expressive force of its own. Central to this chapter is the tension between silence and the novel's autobiographical mode, in which the act of narrating retrospectively frames, interprets, and transforms moments of silence. The chapter argues that Jane's self-authored account not only records but actively reconfigures silence into a vehicle for self-understanding and agency. Focusing on Jane's relationships with Helen Burns, Bertha Mason, St John Rivers, and Edward Rochester, it shows how silence mediates emotional and ideological tensions, while also being reframed by autobiographical narration. In *Jane Eyre*, silence is not merely oppressive or passive, but a generative, unstable force integral to the novel's exploration of identity, resistance, and relationality.

Chapter Four examines *Villette*, where silence is embedded within a pervasive culture of surveillance. While the previous chapters addressed silence as a mode of communication breakdown (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) or as an evolving tool of self-definition (*Jane Eyre*), here silence operates in a context dominated by acts of eavesdropping, overhearing, and covert observation. In *Villette*, these practices are not incidental plot devices but sustained thematic elements, shaping both character interactions and the reader's engagement with the narrative. Lucy Snowe's experience in the *Pensionnat* – a space where privacy is continually threatened – illustrates how silence becomes both a response to and a means of negotiating constant watchfulness. This chapter argues that the relationship between silence and surveillance is not simply reactive: the two are mutually constitutive, with silence functioning as a strategy to manage, subvert, or redirect intrusive observation. Through narrative techniques such as circumnarration, a deliberately integrated bilingual text, and encrypted communication, the text itself creates a protected space in which identity can be asserted beyond the reach of prying eyes and ears. In *Villette*, silence is therefore not merely defensive but an active force in shaping selfhood under conditions of continual observation.

Chapter Five analyses *Shirley*, a novel whose seemingly episodic, sketch-like structure serves as a deliberate challenge to the unified, authoritative discourse of ruling-class men. Rather than offering a direct account of historical events or contemporary conditions, the novel constructs a decentralised narrative built from marginalised, unofficial voices. Central to this design is the recurring motif of 'listening', which links disparate episodes to the main plot – the Luddite disturbances and their aftermath – while holding gender and class themes in balance. The chapter examines three principal character groups: middle-class women, working-class men, and working-class women. For both the first two groups, the act of listening becomes a secondary mode of engagement, revealing their shared marginal position in the dominant historical narrative, yet also providing opportunities for strategic self-assertion. The novel further stages a hierarchy among different forms of listening, often inflected by gender. Positioned between the other two groups, working-class women occupy an often ignored but pivotal role: their ostensibly minor contributions become acts of resistance against the devalued status of listening. In its conclusion, the novel invites the reader to 'listen' to these marginalised voices, thereby enacting the very dynamic it thematically explores.

In sum, this thesis explores how the Brontë sisters employed the themes of sound, silence, and listening to shape the narrative architecture of their novels. By examining the formal and structural functions of sonic motifs across their novels, the present thesis aims to illuminate how these devices contribute to plot construction, thematic articulation, and readerly engagement. Through close textual analysis, each chapter demonstrates that the Brontës' treatment of sonic elements is not incidental but central to their fiction-making.

Chapter One: Sound as a Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*

This chapter delves into the prevalence of sonic elements in *Wuthering Heights*, and the structural and thematic relationship between sound and another key concept in the novel – the boundary. In her introduction to *Wuthering Heights*, Pauline Nestor reviews many critical papers on the novel and summarises that, whatever issues these readings concentrate on, ‘all have been inclined to highlight conflict and division in the novel’ (xvii). Indeed, the world in the novel appears to be a world of opposites, with recurring notions of self and other, nature and culture, heaven and hell, etc. On the level of plot and characterisation, the main characters, Catherine Earnshaw, Heathcliff, and Edgar Linton, of the first generation, are posed against Catherine Linton (referred to as ‘Cathy’ in this chapter), Hareton Earnshaw, and Linton Heathcliff of the second generation. The relationships between characters inside each group begin in a somewhat similar manner, but end entirely differently, and thus the two generations stand as another crucial pair of symmetrical oppositions. Yet critics also observe the underlying attempt at challenging and overthrowing such readings of dichotomy throughout the narrative. When Elizabeth R. Napier examines the recurring imagery of ‘boundaries’ in the novel, she comments that the novel’s apparent emphasis on boundaries is ‘in an ultimate sense paradoxical’, since for her the narrative is ‘based on a scheme in which distinctions collapse and the limits between characters dissolve; categories are not bounded and discrete but undemarcated and fluid’ (95). Similarly, Nicoletta Brazzelli notes how ‘the boundaries between human and non-human nature are presented as permeable’ (244). This pair of parallel tendencies to emphasise both the oppositional categorisation and an urge to transgress it can be partly explained by the novel's Gothic frame narratives, which according to Clayton Tarr, 'routinely demonstrate the uncertainty of structure and the ambiguity of boundaries' (7). However, to better comprehend such concurrent assertion and rejection of distinctions and boundaries, one must examine the presentation of sounds in *Wuthering Heights*.

'Behind the Gothic's patent preoccupations with sight and visibility,' declares Dale Townshend, 'lies a rich though critically neglected history of sound and the auditory sense' (para. 15). Yet it is difficult to neglect sound in *Wuthering Heights*, as it is a particularly 'noisy' novel. In fact, this is a novel where aural phenomena prevail. The novel is immersed with vivid sounds: the wuthering gale, the murmur of summer foliage, the mellow flow of the beck, the tapping of the fir branches. More importantly, these sounds are meaningful, serving as an indispensable part of the narrative, speaking for the characters, and helping in constructing a non-linear chronology. Brontë's characters move in a world so flooded with natural sounds and human voices that these features construct a narrative, rather than serving as the mere employment of literary devices. Schafer in *The Soundscape* categorises three main themes loosely based on the opposition between nature and culture: 'keynote sounds', 'signals', and 'soundmarks'. The keynote sounds of a landscape are 'those created by its geography and climate: water, wind, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals', sounds that mostly go unnoticed in the background. Signals are the 'foreground sounds' that are 'listened to consciously', and especially those intended as an alarm/warning: 'bell, whistles, horns and sirens' (9-10).[10] In *Wuthering Heights*, such a nature/human distinction is frequently blurred, and the components of the novel's soundscape constantly shift between background and foreground: wind sounding in the tree becomes a ghost's tapping on the window, and a sigh of the dead turns into a soft breeze breathing through the grave. On the one hand, such a transition between unrelated auditory phenomena creates uncanny sounds that are characteristic of the Gothic novel: as Isabella van Elferen puts it, sound 'suggests presence even when this presence is invisible or intangible, and is thus closely related to the ghostly' (4). On the other hand, the easy transition between unrelated sounds indicates a soundscape that is heterogenous but harmonious, with the components inherently interconnected to each other.

In his article 'Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts', James Kincaid summarises four types of readings of *Wuthering Heights* based on Northrop Frye's work. Frye categorises literary works into four narrative patterns: romance, tragedy, comedy, and irony. Kincaid argues that any article on *Wuthering Heights* must belong to one, and only one of these four categories, and that these four readings of the novel are incompatible. However, since the novel contains all four types of narrative patterns, with each developing incoherently into one another, the four corresponding types of readings can coexist, and all of them are to some extent 'correct' (794-8). Likewise, Hillis Miller believes that the best readings of this novel are the ones 'which best account for the heterogeneity of the text, its presentation of a definite group of possible meanings which are systematically interconnected, determined by the text, but logically incompatible’ (51). As the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, this interestingly paradoxical feature of the novel’s narrative is in fact represented through its sonic elements. This chapter examines how different sounds in *Wuthering Heights* are interconnected and even interchangeable with each other – for example, between natural sounds and human voices, between meaningful language and meaningless noises, and between provincial and authoritative voices. These interrelated and interchangeable sounds blur and break down spatial and temporal boundaries, linking seemingly opposed realms such as past and present, dream and reality, life and death. Eventually, sound functions as a narrative of the novel, a narrative that finds its origin all the way back to the Romantic idea of sound, a legacy that Emily Brontë inherits and adopts throughout her creative life. This legacy will be briefly touched upon in Section 4: a thorough examination of Romanticism and its intellectual history is beyond the scope of this chapter, and might risk shifting the focus away from the chapter’s core concerns; however, a brief reference helps illuminate the author’s creative engagement with sound. Eventually, this chapter explores how the sound narrative reflects the novel’s general tendency to simultaneously construct and dismantle oppositions, while also suggesting the author’s ultimate vision: it is a narrative pointing not towards division, but towards unity and harmony.

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[10] The third category, 'soundmarks', refers to sounds that are unique to and specifically recognised by a particular community, and may thus be considered a specialised form of 'signals' – that is, sounds whose meaning is acknowledged by a smaller group. Both signals and soundmarks are culturally constructed, in contrast to keynote sounds. As soundmarks are not directly relevant to the discussion in this chapter, the term is briefly explained here for completeness.

1. Natural Sounds vs. Human Voices

In *Wuthering Heights*, natural sounds and human voices are often connected with each other, and events among human characters are often mediated through natural phenomena. The novel centres on the dramatic love-hate relationships between two generations of two families living on the isolated moor: Earnshaws from Wuthering Heights (including Heathcliff, the adopted boy of unknown origin) and Lintons from Thrushcross Grange. Yet, the story is narrated from the perspective of Lockwood, a recently-arrived outsider and vacationer, who hears about this history from Nelly Dean, the housekeeper, twenty years after the death of the central figure, Catherine Earnshaw. However, the reader's first encounter with Catherine (and Lockwood's, for that matter) is not through Nelly's recollections, but through Lockwood's mysterious dream.

Stranded by a snowstorm, Lockwood is forced to stay overnight at Wuthering Heights. Led to a deserted chamber, he soon finds out from the writing scratched inside the closet-bed that this room once belonged to a Catherine Earnshaw. Sleeping, he first dreams of going to a tedious sermon which escalates into a fight, and is woken by the sound of a fir branch tapping on the lattice window. Falling into sleep again, he dreams a second dream, in which he breaks the lattice to stop the tapping branch outside, but instead finds a child scratching the window with its hand. Asking to be admitted in, the child claims to be Catherine's ghost and have wandered on the moor for twenty years. Unable to stop her, Lockwood yells aloud in horror and is woken again by his own shriek.

This dream episode attracted much critical attention in 1950s and 1960s: Ruth M.

Adams[11], Edgar F. Shannon[12] and Dorothy van Ghent have postulated different theories about either or both of the dreams and their significance for the novel as a whole. In particular, Ronald E. Fine contends that dreams in the novel are not ‘literary constructs’ with thematic significance only applicable to this particular story, but are ‘psychological realities, givens, with their own pre-established symbolic implications’. More specifically, these dreams ‘provide the template for the narrative which they introduce’, for they contain elements that recur throughout the novel and actions that are ‘archetypes for crucial narrative actions’ (20-1). Napier additionally notes how, in this episode, the repeated shifting between reality and dream in Lockwood’s account blurs the boundaries between the two states to the degree that ‘the true status of the ghost Catherine is uncertain’ (98). Immediately following this remark, Napier refers to Ghent’s analysis of the lattice window, which is ‘treacherously transparent’ (Ghent 190), an image that points to the instability of the boundaries between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’, the ‘human’ and the alien ‘other’. Here, however, Napier is actually referring to two different boundaries that are treated in different ways, reflecting two different kinds of ‘momentum’ throughout the novel, and thus they should be viewed differently. The image of the lattice – as well as other forms of physical boundaries including doors, walls, gates, etc. that are repeatedly broken or crossed over by characters – points to the constant tension between an assertion of the dividing lines and an impulse to eliminate them, a negotiation in which violence is often involved. However, the smooth shifting between dream and reality in Lockwood's nightmare episode highlights an inevitable, sometimes unnoticed, even unquestionable fusion between spaces, and this easy fusion is achieved by sounds penetrating back and forth, and thus weaving the two states into an inseparable one.

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[11] See Adams 58-62. He pays special attention to Lockwood’s first nightmare, and proposes that Lockwood’s dream pilgrimage foretells that he has arrived at a place of no morality, and where all including himself will be corrupted.

[12] Shannon argues that the two dreams should be viewed as a whole, which introduces the author’s redefinition of evil, challenge against acknowledged morality, and defence for a transcendent ethic. See 95-109.

Trapped in the dream of a chapel 'resounded with rappings and counter-rappings', Lockwood is thankfully woken by Reverend Branderham's 'loud taps' on the pulpit, when both noises turn out to be the 'branch of a fir-tree that touched [his] lattice' and 'rattled its dry cones against the panes'. This rattling merges into another dream, where Lockwood finds the sound so annoying that he breaks the lattice to seize it, only to find in his hand the hand of ghost Catherine. Cornered by ghost Catherine who is scratching on the book pile keeping her from getting in, Lockwood shouts aloud in the dream, and is woken up by his own voice in reality. In addition, his yell also rouses Heathcliff, who has been waiting for Catherine's ghost to come back for twenty years, and mistakes Lockwood's voices and noises for those made by the ghost: noticing Heathcliff's approach, Lockwood opens the closet-bed's panel to show himself, and the 'first creak of the oak startled [Heathcliff] like an electric shock' (*WH* 24-6). In this scene, sounds not only function as a constant clue throughout, but more importantly, they signify the inevitable collapse of boundaries between reality and dream, natural and supernatural. Here, van Ghent remarks on the paradoxical nature of the lattice image:

> The treachery of the window is that Catherine, lost now alone in the 'otherness', can look through the transparent membrane that separates her from humanity, can scratch on the pane, but cannot get 'in', while Heathcliff, though he forces the window open and howls into the night, cannot get 'out'.

> (192)

Sounds, on the other hand, are not met with this assertion of the dividing lines: the tapping of fir branches penetrates from reality into dream, whereas Lockwood's yell penetrates from dream into reality. This seamless transition reflects the author's emphasis on the dissolution of the boundaries, rather than the boundaries *per se*. In the second dream, ghost Catherine's voice first goes through the lattice, and then through the book pile blocking the hole on the window, each time signalling her attempted entry into the Heights, as well as the inefficacy of the physical boundaries. Moreover, it is exactly her voice from outside the lattice that leads Lockwood to break the window; while he intends to stretch his arm *out* to stop the sound, by creating the hole in the window, he in effect invites the ghost *in*. This dissolving power of sounds on boundaries culminates at the ending of this episode. While the sounds that have attracted Heathcliff turn out to be from Lockwood rather than ghost Catherine, disappointing him exceedingly, a reversal immediately follows when Lockwood complains to him in vivid details about how this place is haunted by the ghost. This news affects Heathcliff so much, that he 'wrenched open the lattice' and cries out for Catherine, an action that is accidentally witnessed by Lockwood:

> 'Come in! come in!' he sobbed. 'Cathy, do come. Oh, do – *once* more! Oh! my heart's darling, hear me *this* time – Catherine, at last!'
>
> The spectre showed a spectre's ordinary caprice; it gave no sign of being; but the snow and wind whirled wildly through, even reaching my station, and blowing out the light. (*WH* 28-9)

At this point, dream and reality are merged into one, and the true state of child Catherine – whether she is a dream vision or a real supernatural being – is not so crucial, for Heathcliff believes in her reality. Whichever state she is in, child Catherine has announced her presence, and such presence is realised especially by penetrative, natural sounds. In fact, here the symbol of window – transparent but intact, a failed attempt at breaking the boundaries – is overcome by the symbol of sounds, which bridges 'inside' from 'outside'. For, the snow and wind which 'whirled wildly through' the broken window and the room, even reaches Lockwood, who is standing in the corridor. The transitional conjunction 'but' implies that these noisy, natural phenomena serve as a proxy for the now silent, vanished ghost who is not allowed into Wuthering Heights.

It can be observed that this episode is in fact driven by sound. The very core of the scene – child Catherine - is established and surrounded by a series of interrelated sounds, which connects several pairs of previously separated spheres, and pushes the plot forward. More importantly, such usage of sound is not unique within the novel, but appears as a repetitive pattern. In his analysis, Fine realises how the dream-combination of 'the window, the sound of the firs against the lattice, and the blast of wind from the heath recurs at critical points' (21). Three years after Heathcliff's sudden departure from the moor (seventeen years before Lockwood's visit at Wuthering Heights and his nightmare of Catherine's ghost), he returns a gentleman, and by encouraging Isabella Linton's infatuation with him (as a means of revenge on the Lintons), he enrages Edgar Linton. Catherine (now married to Edgar) tries and fails to mediate between the two, and after a heated quarrel between her and Edgar, she locks herself in her room and refuses to eat. Falling ill and in distress, Catherine falls into a dream-like liminal state, in which she fancies herself back in her room at Wuthering Heights: '"Oh, if I were but in my own bed in the old house!" she went on bitterly, wringing her hands. "And that wind sounding in the firs by the lattice. Do let me feel it – it comes straight down the moor – do let me have one breath!"' (*WH* 124)

While Fine analyses the elements in Lockwood's dreams in terms of their symbolic and psychological implications, and argues that the window, the sound of the fir, and the wind combined carry sexual connotations throughout the narrative (21), their more crucial dimension lies in their most immediate and literal meaning: they are natural sounds associated with Catherine. The sound of 'firs against the lattice' and the 'blast of wind' are two innately inter-connected elements of a larger soundscape, an overarching orchestration of all sorts of sounds, voices, and noises that permeate the novel. Analysing the 'moving sounds' in the natural soundscape in general, Schafer pays special attention to the curious relationship between the wind and the tree. 'Without objects in its path, the wind betrays no apparent movement.' he notes, 'It hovers in the ears, energetic but directionless. Of all objects, trees give the best cues, shaking their leaves now on one side, now on the other as the wind brushes them' (23). More importantly, these interconnected sounds are also closely linked to Catherine herself, highlighting the wild and natural qualities embedded in her character.

The figure of Catherine is closely associated with nature and natural phenomenon, and this association is represented in the concurrent emergence of human voice and natural sounds. In Lockwood's dream, he hears distinctly 'the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow' as well as 'the fir-bough repeat its teasing sound' (*WH* 25), where the latter turns out to be ghost Catherine's hand tapping, followed by her melancholic sobbing. In this case, human voice is simultaneously *accompanied by* and *identified with* natural sounds. Later, when Heathcliff's cry for the ghost is answered by whirling snow and wind through the room, the natural sounds become a de facto replacement for human voice. Similarly, when Catherine in her sickbed begs for a breath of the wind from the moor which she believes will give her a 'chance of life', she stresses that it is the wind 'sounding in the firs by the lattice' (124, 126). Here, the living breath required by a human is identified with wild wind from the moor, resulting from a sound occurring at the intersection point of the natural and the artificial. In addition, the fir-tree serves as a two-way beacon for both the wind to find its way to Catherine, and for Catherine to locate her memory and breath of life.

Another example of the author's intentional fusion of human voices and natural sounds is Mr Earnshaw's death scene. Mr Earnshaw, who is Catherine's father and who takes the homeless Heathcliff to Wuthering Heights, becomes irritable and moody in his later years, yet he dies 'quietly…seated by the fire-side' one October evening. The scene begins with a curious depiction of the weather: 'A high wind blustered round the house, and *roared* in the chimney: it sounded wild and stormy, yet it was not cold, and we were all together…' (*WH* 43, my italics). Having exchanged a conversation with her father that irritates him a little, Catherine softens her attitude by 'singing very low' and lulls Mr Earnshaw to a doze. After some time when all '[keep] as mute as mice', Joseph the servant goes to rouse Mr Earnshaw for prayers, when he realises that his master is dead. He tries to send young Catherine and

Heathcliff away first but fails, and when Catherine discovers her loss, she screams out to Heathcliff and 'they both set up a heart-breaking cry'. Nelly joins them and wails 'loud and bitter', but Joseph hushes them all, saying that they should not '*roar* in that way' (my italics). When all is settled for the moment, it is past midnight, and Nelly finds that Catherine and Heathcliff are comforting each other 'in their innocent talk; and, while I sobbed, and listened, I could not help wishing we were all there [in Heaven] safe together' (44).

Although the weather is severe and the roaring invades into the chimney, its harshness is initially blocked by the hearth, a traditional image of domestic bliss, around which all the characters stay. Yet this safe state is soon broken by the death of Mr Earnshaw, who is the master of this family and who had been seated closest to the hearth. As such, the protection of the fire-place – the shield of domestic harmony – against outside coldness is destroyed, but this loss in efficacy is shown not in the physical, material loss of heat in the room, but in the intrusion of sounds: when Joseph dismisses Catherine, Heathcliff, and Nelly's crying as an inappropriate 'roar', the author skilfully identifies human voices with natural sounds, and the boundaries between inside and outside, human and natural are again smoothly dissolved. From this moment on, the fire of domestic bliss is permanently put out by the severe wild blowing through, and Catherine and Heathcliff are fated never to live safely and happily together. (Following Mr Earnshaw's death, his son Hindley's return to the Heights, and begins a tyrant's rule in the household, which is targeted especially at Heathcliff.) Nelly's wish on the night of Mr. Earnshaw's death that they were 'all there together' resonates with the beginning of this scene in an ironic way, when they were 'all together' by the hearth, safe from the metaphorical 'sounding coldness outside' for the last time in their lives. In fact, the painful future of Catherine and Heathcliff is already foreboded in this ending, when we realise that their voices – their 'roar' – have been associated with the wild wind blowing from the moor, as its destructive power undermines the 'Heavenly beauty' of their 'innocent talk'.

As human voices, particularly Catherine's, are juxtaposed with and transformed to/back from natural sounds, the author constructs an internally interconnected soundscape that serves multiple functions. It not only propels the plot and characterises characters, but also expands the spatial dimensions of the story, linking human and nature, past and present, enclosed domestic interiors and the open wilderness.

2. Voices vs. Noises

In the novel, Brontë not only reconsiders and challenges the boundaries between natural and human sounds, but also explores the pair of binary opposition within the category of 'human sounds': human voices and human noises. To define these two concepts in the simplest terms, voices are human sounds that successfully convey information and meanings, while noises are sounds that fail to serve such communicative functions. In *Wuthering Heights*, voices mainly appear as accepted language, whereas noises appear in various forms and on various levels, such as unintelligible 'gibberish', regressive, infantile speech, and phonetic transcription of regional dialects. However, the author presents these two categories again as interchangeable, a dynamic primarily embodied by four characters: Joseph, Heathcliff, Linton, and Hareton. This section will examine two representational frameworks through which Brontë explores the fluid boundary between voice and noise: the ambivalent status of Joseph's dialect speech both within and without the narrative, and the reworking of the folkloric, changeling narrative – enacted through the intertwined fates of Heathcliff, Linton, and Hareton – to dramatise the unstable interchange between intelligible voice and illegible noise.

As a novel set in Yorkshire, *Wuthering Heights* contains sporadic dialect expressions that are observed in the language of a wide range of characters – the term 'wuthering' being the most notable among them, but the illustration of a strong, dialect speech is restricted to Joseph alone.[13] In the novel, Joseph's lines are entirely written in phonetic transcription, and while his heavy accent does not hinder his communication with other characters within the plot, this faithful rendering, when presented as text, was potentially 'in a great measure unintelligible' to readers who were unfamiliar with this dialect, as Charlotte Brontë pointed out in her Preface to the 1850 edition of her late sister's novel (xlvi). To make Joseph's lines more intelligible, Charlotte even made slight modifications to the original text. In her analysis on Joseph's speech and Charlotte's modifications, Irene Wiltshire observes that Charlotte's judgement was likely informed by her two-week stay in London shortly before writing this preface, during which she engaged with a variety of 'Southern' men of letters (26-7); thus, her assessment carried certain weight. From this perspective, while Joseph's speech is intelligible within the narrative, it functions as noises (incomprehensible phonetic occurrences) from an external, textual point of view.

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[13] Although Hareton catches up with Joseph's dialect initially, after befriending Cathy, his speech soon develops into standard English.

Yet, even within the narrative, Joseph's language appears to waver between voice and noise. As Wiltshire points out, Joseph's conversation with Isabella Linton – he mocks Isabella's gentrified speech and word-choice such as '*parlour*' – shows 'very clearly the association of regional dialect with lower-class status' and Joseph's awareness and mockery of it (Wiltshire 23). In other words, the marginalisation of his speech reflects the marginalisation of his social power.[14] However, Joseph is simultaneously the most pious, dogmatic Christian among the characters, and his frequent Biblical references – often to pass moral judgement on central characters – link his language to the Word of God, the ultimate significant voice. Such association with religious power is symbolically presented in Lockwood's first nightmare: Joseph appears as the guide leading Lockwood to hear a sermon in the chapel, and he reproaches Lockwood for not carrying a 'pilgrim's staff' as he does, yet Joseph's staff is actually a 'weapon' – a 'heavy-headed cudgel' (*WH* 23).

Thus, Joseph's speech embodies a tension between the marginalised regional dialect and the orthodox language of religious authority: two discourses connected through this speaker simultaneously counteract with each other. Moreover, the supposed power of Joseph's orthodox language comes under pressure from another seemingly marginalised language: that of folksongs and folklores. Near the end of the novel, when Lockwood returns to Wuthering Heights for the last time in September 1802, he walks through the unlocked gate uninvited, eavesdrops on an intimate conversation between Cathy and Hareton about the latter's book-learning, and realises they have become lovers. Afraid of being noticed and sworn at by Hareton, Lockwood sneaks to the kitchen and finds Nelly singing a song, which is often interrupted by Joseph with his ‘harsh words of scorn and intolerance, uttered in far from musical accents’. Joseph condemns Nelly’s song as ‘glories tuh sattan’, laments that Hareton has been ruined by her and Cathy, and invokes God for judgements on them. Nelly laughs his words off, and asks him to be quiet: ‘But wisht, old man, and read your Bible, like a Christian, and never mind me. This is “Fairy Annie’s Wedding” – a bonny tune – it goes to a dance’ (*WH* 308).

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[14] While Joseph seems to be a powerful servant – he talks rudely to his superiors, refuses to lead Isabella to her bedroom, and has certain influence on young Hareton – throughout the narrative, his words rarely have the power to essentially influence others' actions.

In this scene, Nelly’s song is the beautiful and powerful ‘musical voice’ that states the reality, i.e. the imminent marriage between Cathy and Hareton, whereas Joseph’s accented references to God are reduced to the unmusical noise that manifests his powerless rejection of the reality and inability to communicate his ideas. In addition, this noise is silenced by Nelly through a means that somehow also involves the invocation of the ultimate voice: she asks Joseph to ‘read your Bible, like a Christian, and never mind me’. Penny Fielding argues that the oral is ‘always [constructed as the socially] other: of writing (speech), of culture (the voice of nature), of the modern (a pre-modern past)’ (4). Similarly, Paula M. Krebs points out that since as early as the seventeenth century, folklore has been associated with women and ‘directly opposed to man-made products such as “Bookes” and gunpowder’ (42). As a crucial part of the oral tradition, folksongs and folklores are supposed to be instantaneous, vulnerable to distortion, and represent a relatively marginalised voice, especially in the face of the authority of the Bible, the most canonical, official, written language in a culture rooted in Christianity. Yet here, the female, balladic, oral voice becomes the truth-stating dominant voice that is connected to the immediate present, and that reduces the male, Biblical voice (which has already been undermined by a marginalised dialect) to a silenced noise; furthermore, this is achieved exactly through the invocation of the Word of God.

Interestingly, while the author emphasises the marginalised character of Joseph's dialectal speech, she simultaneously challenges the marginalised status of folklore and folksongs, and endows them with an authority. The above example of the truth-telling power of Nelly's folksongs is not an isolated case, and another important example of Nelly's foretelling folksong will be discussed in Section 4. Moreover, although incidental allusions such as 'demons', 'fairies', 'ghoul or vampire' are detected throughout the novel, Jacqueline Simpson argues that Brontë 'normally puts her folklore references to structural or thematic use' ('Functions' 53). Besides the character of Joseph, Brontë also discusses the interrelation and interchangeability between human voice and noise through the complex relationship between Heathcliff, his son Linton, and Hareton, and she realises such discussion by embedding a hidden folkloric structure: the intertwined fates of these three characters suggest a variation of the changeling narrative. Within this narrative, the distinction and dynamic between effective, recognisable voice and ineffective, illegible noise emerge as a critical marker.

Until at least the beginning of the twentieth century, death in infancy and childhood had been a commonality. To give an example from the Victorian era, Asa Briggs notes that 'forty percent of the total recorded deaths in Middlesbrough in the years 1871-3 were of children under the age of one year: deaths of children between the ages of one and five accounted for another 20 percent' (269). Accordingly, literature on childhood death – ballads, folklores, diaries, poems – is found across time and cultures, reflecting different attitudes towards and concern about the topic: guilt over negligence of the parents, anxiety about having no proper burial, belief that the child shall reunite with the parents in heaven.[15]

In Victorian Britain, childhood death became closely associated with a newly rediscovered symbol, the fairy or the elfin people. This linkage partly resulted from a general fairy fascination of the age, which manifested itself in paintings, literature, plays, seances in the nineteenth century,[16] and partly from a psychological need to provide an explanation for the disappearance, deformities and/or death of children. As Jacqueline Simpson suggests, it would be 'emotionally more tolerable to ascribe the sickness or death of one's child to the attacks of some demonic enemy, thus allowing a free outlet for anger' ('Changelings' 21). Among the different types of elfin people, one specific fairy is frequently used for this purpose, and it is the changeling – 'children perceived as abnormal surreptitiously substituted for normal ones' (Silver 59).

In *Wuthering Heights*, the word 'changeling' appears twice, but merely as curse words on ghost Catherine (when she haunts Lockwood's nightmare) and on Linton (when Nelly and Cathy are tricked into confinement by him). The real changelings in the novel are not called out in this name, but rather stay as part of a hidden structure, and must be detected through their close association with childhood death. As Janet Gezari discusses Brontë's attitude towards death, she points out that almost every character in *Wuthering Heights* experiences the death of others and mourns, and a majority of them die in the course of the story.[17] Gezari gives this interesting statement that 'Every romantic relationship, except that of Catherine and Heathcliff, begins when one or both of the parties to it are in mourning' (111). It is true that the relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff – whether it is purely romantic is another question – does not begin when either is in mourning, but its beginning is indeed marked by a death, even more so, a childhood death. In fact, this death is the ultimate origin of the entire story: that of 'Heathcliff Earnshaw', a son who had died in childhood in Wuthering Heights.

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[15] See Avery, Gillian and Kimberley Reynolds 1-10.

[16] For Victorian fairy fascination and its Romantic origin, see Silver 3-32.

When Heathcliff first arrives at Wuthering Heights, he is a 'dirty, ragged, black-haired child' that is 'as dark almost as if it came from the devil'. When he is set on his feet, he only '[stares] around' and repeats 'some gibberish that nobody could understand', and Nelly calls him by the pronoun 'it' (*WH* 36-7). Soon, 'it' is given the name 'Heathcliff' both for Christian and surname, as if replacing the dead child of the same name. From a realistic perspective, Heathcliff's unknown origin, gypsy countenance, and initial inability to speak English hints at his racial otherness, and that he is found in Liverpool – the premier slaving port in Britain after Bristol – points to his possible identity as a victim of the slave trade.[18] Yet, in a more supernatural context, this racial otherness can be explained as other than *the human race*. Changelings are usually ugly, deformed fairies that have 'dark or sallow skin' and are 'backward in learning to walk or speak' (Silver 60); Brontë has paid attention to describe this child in a manner that reminds the contemporary readers of this folklore.

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[17] For detailed analysis on Brontë's view of death and its representation in *Wuthering Heights*, see Gezari 110-2.

[18] For more on this topic, see von Sneidern 171-96. Also see Humphrey Gawthrop 281-9, who explores Brontë family's knowledge of slavery in Britain.

However, Heathcliff is not a changeling in its typical sense. JoAnn Conrad concludes that a typical changeling narrative contains six parts: the abduction of a child; the substitution of the changeling for the child; ensuing chaos that the changeling brings to the household; suspicion and recognition of the changeling; riddance of the changeling from the household; the eventual return of the original child (179). Heathcliff's initial arrival seems very different from such a narrative. He is not secretly sent by a malicious fairy mother to replace a still living 'Heathcliff Earnshaw', but instead is actively taken in by Mr. Earnshaw, the human father. In fact, Heathcliff seems to have been unwillingly and even forcibly 'abducted' by Mr. Earnshaw, for taking him home has clearly exhausted Mr. Earnshaw ('I was never so beaten with anything in my life', *WH* 36), and gifts promised for Hindley and Catherine are either broken or lost in the course, which hints at physical conflict. Moreover, he is never mistaken by anyone for the real 'Heathcliff Earnshaw', not even by Mr. Earnshaw, who adores him so much – that he is given the name of the dead child indicates his identity as a 'known changeling' in the Earnshaw family (38). He is a substitute for Heathcliff Earnshaw, bearing the latter's name, but never an Earnshaw, and he is fiercely rejected by all of the family members (except for his 'kidnapper' Mr. Earnshaw) following his introduction to the Heights. Yet, Heathcliff still conforms to this narrative in that he undoubtedly brings about dramatic chaos to the Earnshaws and even the Lintons, to which family he is connected through Isabella Linton. Heathcliff bears the distinctive psyche of a changeling: a creature 'noteworthy for its gluttony and peevishness, its lack of heart or soul, and its strange, malicious, or ungovernable spirit' (Silver 60). To the Earnshaws and the Lintons, Heathcliff is undoubtedly an ‘imp of Satan’ (*WH* 39), who harbours such intense hatred and almost destroys the two families.

It can be realised that, in the figure of the changeling, traits such as skin colour, heartless disposition, and lack of linguistic ability function as markers of the *other*. Among them, language, as a thoroughly human construct, is a key sign that distinguishes the human from the non-human. Although Heathcliff speaks only gibberish upon his arrival at Wuthering Heights, he quickly acquires standard English and, after his three-year absence, returns as a gentleman – his social ascension is marked by a corresponding elevation in his gentrified language. Moreover, Heathcliff chooses to take revenge on the Earnshaws by playing with the existing law – legal language being a sort of coded, precise language that is exclusive to the human society, and a language that he has acquired during the three-year leave. In terms of linguistic ability, then, he seems to stop being a changeling shortly after he is taken into Wuthering Heights. However, when two further key figures are introduced into the narrative – Linton Heathcliff and Hareton Earnshaw – it becomes clear that linguistic incapacity as a signifier of the non-human does not disappear, but rather moves between the three characters. In fact, its movement marks critical moments of the changeling’s riddance and the return of the original child.

To begin with, both Hareton and Linton are noted for their language incapacity, though at different points of time. After Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights with a mode of language that is eloquent, powerful, and seductive, he uses it to lure and reduce the young Hareton into a situation similar to his initial state as a boy who speaks ‘gibberish’. Illiterate as he is, Hareton cannot read the inscription over the Heights's doorway or fully understand Cathy's and Linton's words, and he speaks rudely with a 'frightful Yorkshire accent'. Hareton is aware of and embarrassed at his inferiority in front of Heathcliff, Cathy, and Linton, which has partly resulted from these lingual-societal defects, and thus, he tends to keep silent, making himself a figure hard to communicate with. As Heathcliff tells Nelly, by depriving Hareton of literacy, he has 'tied his tongue' and the boy will 'not venture a single syllable, all the time' (*WH* 220). Even when Hareton does speak out of irritation, his heavy provincial accent and use of 'bad words' are immediately laughed at and dismissed by Cathy and Linton. Here, his voice is powerless, for the meaning of his speech is intentionally blocked by Cathy and Linton, and his threats are therefore ineffective. Hence, his voice is invalidated and reduced to a noise, just like the 'gibberish' uttered by young Heathcliff. Neither characters within the novel nor the reader know whether Heathcliff's initial gibberish is really meaningless noises or a language not known and understood by the Earnshaws.

Meanwhile, Linton seems to serve as Hareton's antithesis, for Linton's language is an educated, commanding, superior voice. Yet when he and Cathy mock Hareton's accented noise, they break into a 'noisy fit of merriment', and his snobbish 'laugh' and 'giggle' is emphasised by the author (*WH* 220). Several pages later, when Cathy visits the Heights to check upon the sickly Linton, a quarrel breaks out between them on the complicated relationship among their parents, and Linton insists Catherine – Cathy's mother – hates Edgar but loves Heathcliff, a claim that Cathy rebuts outright. When she accuses Linton of lying, Linton breaks into a feverish fit of insistent repetition:

> ‘And she loved mine [father, referring to Heathcliff]!’ added he.
>
> ‘You little liar! I hate you now,’ she panted, and her face grew red with passion.
>
> ‘*She did! she did!*’ *sang* Linton, sinking into the recess of his chair, and leaning back his head to enjoy the agitation of the other disputant, who stood behind.
>
> ‘Hush, Master Heathcliff!’ I [Nelly] said, ‘that’s your father’s tale too, I suppose.’
>
> ‘It isn’t – you hold your tongue!' he answered. ‘*She did, she did, Catherine, she did, she did!*’ (239, my italics)

As it turns out, Linton’s language is not what one would expect of a civilised and educated young ‘gentleman’. He does not speak eloquently like Heathcliff (or Edgar), but often resorts to simple, repetitive chants in his excitement. While his chant-like assertions seem to have power over Cathy, rendering her into passionate agitation that he sadistically ‘enjoys’, this verbal violence is soon retorted by physical violence, when Cathy pushes his chair and leads him to a fall provoking a ‘suffocating cough that soon ended his triumph’. During another visit to the Heights, Cathy witnesses a similar confrontation, but this time between Linton and Hareton. Teased again by Cathy on his illiteracy, Hareton’s shame and sense of inferiority turns into enragement on seeing her read for Linton, and he rudely shuts the two out of the parlour, locks the door, forcing them to go somewhere else. In face of such treatment, Linton expresses a ‘frantic, powerless fury’, and shrieks: ‘If you don’t let me in I’ll kill you! If you don’t let me in I’ll kill you! Devil! devil! I’ll kill you, I’ll kill you!’ His shrieks soon develop into a ‘dreadful fit of coughing’, with blood gushing out of his mouth, causing him to fall on the ground (251). Although Linton is the literate, legitimate young master at this point, he is ‘powerless’ in front of the illiterate, quasi-servant Hareton’s violence, or even Joseph’s mocking. Linton’s repetitive chants are not an assertion of the power of his language, but the evidence of its impotence – he repeats exactly because he cannot get what he demands. He can neither persuade Cathy to believe his claim, nor go to the parlour and kill Hareton. In both incidents, his chants are followed by furious and desperate shrieks, sobs, wailing, or screams. In fact, Linton’s language is that of an infant: his good language frequently regresses into a primitive noise that can do no more than elicit the bare minimum of response from those around him – just enough to make the noise stop.

It should be noted that, while Cathy seems to always give in to Linton’s arbitrary demands – riding across the moor to visit him, reading to and singing ballads for him – the motivation behind her actions is her care for him, rather than her inferiority in the power relationship between the two. She confidently tells Nelly that ‘I’d make such a pet of him, if he were mine’ (242). In spite of Linton’s extreme fear of Heathcliff’s brutal power, Cathy successfully persuades him to help her out of confinement at the Heights, resulting in her timely escape to her dying father at the Grange, through her deceased mother’s room and the fir tree outside the room window.[19]

Through the language especially of Heathcliff, Linton, and Hareton, Brontë re-examines the idea of human voices and noises, and intricately displays the interchangeability between them. As a changeling, Heathcliff's initial linguistic incapacity is transferred first to Hareton, and then to Linton. It is easy to overlook the fact that, not only is Linton the son of Heathcliff, but he is also a newcomer/intruder to Wuthering Heights. He is born and raised for over a decade at a faraway place which is never pinpointed. Having stayed at Thrushcross Grange for only one day, the master of which Linton bears extreme resemblance to, the boy is unwillingly 'kidnapped' to the Heights by Heathcliff, just as Heathcliff himself was 'kidnapped' years ago by Mr. Earnshaw. In this sense, there are *two* changelings in the novel, and Heathcliff is both a changeling himself and the 'fairy mother' that substitutes Hareton, the real heir of the Earnshaw household, with his changeling child, Linton Heathcliff.

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[19] This scene is crucial both in terms of plot development and symbolism, and the latter will be discussed in Section 4.

Under this framework, the inability to speak is shown in both Heathcliff's own changeling child and the replaced real child for different reasons. Hareton's illiteracy, constant silence, and – when he does speak – 'low language', dismissed by Cathy and Linton, result from the unfortunate fact that he is the 'real child' cut off from his own family by the malicious 'fairy mother'. This disconnection is manifested in Hareton's inability to read the inscription on the door, which consists of the beginning year of his bloodline and his ancestor of the same name. As for Linton, under the façade of educated language, he frequently retrogrades to an infantile way of speech, composed of repeated, short sentences and wailing and screaming. Moreover, as his health declines, his temper becomes more fretted, and his infantile speech more frequent. If the two changelings intruding upon the Earnshaw family are seen as a whole, linked by their blood relationships and similar experience, then a 'rise and fall' pattern can be detected in terms of language ability. While Heathcliff improves from speaking gibberish to articulation, Linton retrogrades from articulation to infant's gibberish. If Heathcliff's initial 'gibberish' is indeed a coherent language not understood, then Linton's repeated but rejected orders are essentially no more than 'gibberish'. As such, Linton's 'inability to speak' is an innate changeling defect gradually revealing itself.

The solution of a changeling narrative is a re-exchange process, with the riddance of the changeling and the return of the original child. In *Wuthering Heights*, such riddance is realised again through death. Linton's retrograding language ability is closely associated with, and reflective of, his retrograding health. After a great deal of 'moaned hisseln, night and day' – at this point it is nothing but noise, rather than proper language – Linton dies in silence (293). Heathcliff approaches his death in an unexpected manner. Sensing his own demise and seeing Catherine's vision, Heathcliff becomes excited and speaks to Nelly and Cathy in ways he has never done before. Following days of this 'strange talk', he is heard groaning and muttering to himself and dies overnight (334). Now that both changelings have died following fits of gibberish – noises, or voices that cannot be understood – the real child Hareton is able to re-acquire his language ability, through the teaching of Cathy, and when he becomes literate enough to 'know his letters', including the inscription of the name of his eponymous ancestor 'Hareton Earnshaw' on the door of Wuthering Heights, he is truly re-admitted into his house.

Heathcliff's eventual death – soaked by rain in a bed – does betray a linkage to one traditional method of dealing with changelings: placing them 'at the intersections of rivers, at the shores of lakes, or at the tideline of the sea', which in reality would often cause the infants to drown (Silver 62). Yet, Heathcliff's death is a choice made by himself. Thus, as a changeling, Heathcliff's experience with the Earnshaw family is a distorted version of the typical pattern: he is abducted into the family as a replacement for a dead child, recognised and rejected by most family members from the beginning for his alien identity, but he still persists in the family for years, and his presence brings about numerous chaos; his eventual riddance from the household is realised by a self-chosen death rather than the action of others, but his expulsion (as well as Linton's) still results in the return of the real child, Hareton Earnshaw. This revised changeling narrative, which focuses on voice/noise, works as a part of the bigger, structural use of folkloric references in the novel. Along with the dialectal language employed in the depiction of Joseph, these references reconsiders the boundaries and interchangeability between human voice and human noise, help to establish the broader concept of 'sound' as a narrative.

3. Overhearing/Eavesdropping and the Frightful Sound

In addition to challenging the boundaries between different sounds, and highlighting their interchangeability – in other words, the connective power of sound – Brontë also explores the destructive power of sound. This is primarily demonstrated through several seemingly incidental moments of overhearing/eavesdropping and the characters' reactions to them.

As noted in the Introduction, overhearing or eavesdropping is an important yet common narrative mechanism in novels of early- and mid-nineteenth century as a device that propels the plot forward. While Gaylin acutely points out how it reflects the anxiety about the transgression of boundaries between private and public spheres, stemming from greater social mobility and closer proximity to strangers in the urban area (5), the case with *Wuthering Heights* is a different one.[20] In the novel there are three pivotal plot-twisting points, all of which appear to be triggered by acts of overhearing/eavesdropping. However, closer examination reveals that in each instance, the defining factor behind the plot-twist is Catherine's own choice – either her mistake in choosing or inability to choose – rather than the act of overhearing/eavesdropping itself. In fact, in the first two episodes, overhearing/eavesdropping is not as crucial as it seems, and in the third episode, no actual overhearing/eavesdropping takes place at all. Nonetheless, the novel curiously dramatises this act, as well as Catherine's anxiety about and fear of it. Such anxiety is not the product of contemporary urban life, as examined in Gaylin's work, but a more primal form of fear. Through these acts and Catherine's reaction to them, Brontë emphasises the chaotic power of the sound, which is associated not only with nature, but even with the supernatural.

The first notable feature about overhearing/eavesdropping acts in *Wuthering Heights* is that, while they occur on many occasions and to the majority of the characters (for example, Lockwood overhears Cathy and Hareton's intimate conversation during his last visit to Wuthering Heights), the most crucial occurrences that lead to major plot twists only happen to the first generation, especially centring around Catherine and Heathcliff. On their first visit to Thrushcross Grange, Catherine and Heathcliff creep 'through a broken hedge', hide outside the drawing-room window, and peep inside through the window. When they find out that Edgar and Isabella Linton are fighting over a puppy with screams and tears, both refusing to take the puppy, they 'laughed outright at the petted things', a sound which is overheard by and reveals them to the Linton youngsters (*WH* 48-9). As a result, Edgar and Isabella call for help, the guard dog is unleashed, Catherine is bitten, and both children are caught. Here the two protagonists' destiny comes to a fatal crossroads: whereas Catherine is treated with care and civility, and invited to stay for the night, Heathcliff is driven out of the house. Catherine is now on the same side of the window as Edgar and Isabella, while Heathcliff stays outside the window alone. Later, he recounts the event to Nelly: 'The curtains were still looped up at one corner; and I resumed my station as spy, because, if Catherine had wished to return, I intended shattering their great glass panes to a million fragments, unless they let her out.' (51)

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[20] For the technological and urban developments that serve as a foundation for change in social soundscape in the mid-nineteenth century, which leads to an anxiety concerning sounds in public and private spheres, also see Schafer 71-87.

Unfortunately, Catherine is tempted by the feet-washing, hair-combing, and food-giving promised to a young lady in a civilised world, and does not wish to return with her intimate companion. The moment Heathcliff leaves Catherine 'as merry as she could be' (51) marks the beginning of them parting ways, and this major twist begins from simply an overheard laugh.[21] Yet, the unchecked transmission of sounds is only the trigger of this episode, and what really proves decisive for the irreversible progression of the storyline is Catherine's choice in *not* wishing to return to Heathcliff at that moment.

Following her first sojourn at Thrushcross Grange, Catherine soon acquaints herself with Edgar, and now she spends far less time with Heathcliff. The rest of the first volume pays much attention to this ‘love triangle’, and the development of these troubled relationships is marked by two major incidents: Catherine’s confession to Nelly about her engagement to Edgar, which is overheard/eavesdropped upon by Heathcliff, leading him to leave for three years, and Catherine’s heated quarrel with Heathcliff and Edgar three years later, which triggers a relapse of the fever that rapidly deteriorates her mental state, bringing about her premature death. Although these two episodes are separated by a span of three years, they correspond with each other both in terms of structure and content, and particularly in their application of and discussion on (supposed) overhearing/eavesdropping.

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[21] The key to this scene is not the transgression of boundaries, as nothing happens when the two children first crawl through the 'broken hedge'; nor are they spotted by the Lintons through the window, even though the Lintons are spotted by them through it.

When these two scenes are juxtaposed for analysis, the first thing to note is that, Catherine’s confession to Nelly is not an isolated, sudden eruption of her emotions, but the culmination of a series of previous exchanges: on this same day, she first disputes with Heathcliff, then with Edgar, and when she is reconciled with the latter, she accepts his proposal of marriage. The two disputes and one engagement reflect Catherine’s situation: she cannot live comfortably with either of them, and yet she rashly chooses one, a choice which she regrets immediately. Her confession to Nelly is the climax of the day, but what leads to this climax is the essence of this episode. Catherine soon pays the price for her choice: Heathcliff overhears her words and leaves without a note, and after she calls out for him in the storm, she is struck down by a serious fever that takes quite some time to recover from. It can be noticed that, to a large extent, the plot development in the second episode echoes that in the first. Soon after Catherine recovers from the fever, she gets married to Edgar and moves to Thrushcross Grange. Three years later, Heathcliff returns, and Catherine quickly breaks into a dispute with him; when Nelly discloses their exchange to Edgar, Edgar comes to participate in the quarrel, causing Catherine to direct her anger towards him. After Heathcliff leaves, Catherine confesses to Nelly about her agitation resulting from her exchanges with both men, and when Edgar returns to force her to make a choice between him and Heathcliff, Catherine is driven to extremity. Her refusal to make this choice triggers a relapse of the fever that has served as the punishment for her (erroneous) attempt at making this choice three years ago. To summarise, these two episodes – echoing each other in plot development – demonstrate and reiterate the kernel of Catherine's tragedy, i.e. her incapability at making the right choice between Heathcliff and Edgar, and what these choices represent.

If Catherine's tragedy will inevitably befall her due to this incapability, the function of overhearing/eavesdropping in these two episodes requires scrutiny. In the first episode, Catherine confesses her views of Edgar and Heathcliff to Nelly, not knowing that Heathcliff is sitting at the 'other side of the settle […] [remaining] silent' (77). According to Nelly, Heathcliff listens till he hears Catherine say 'It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now'. Struck by her words, he 'steal[s] out, noiselessly', missing the other half of the sentence 'so he shall never know how I love him' and Catherine's claim that her soul is the same as his, and absolutely different from Edgar's (81).[22] It is natural to assume Heathcliff would not have left Catherine should he have overheard the full conversation, or have overheard nothing at all, but the assumption, though seemingly intuitive, is more questionable than it first appears. Just before Catherine speaks these words, she tells Nelly about her dream in which she realises ‘heaven did not seem to be my home’, and concludes that ‘I’ve no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven’. Still earlier on in the conversation, Catherine laments how ‘In whichever place the soul lives – in my soul, and in my heart, I’m convinced I’m wrong [in accepting Edgar’s proposal]!’ (80) Heathcliff knows clearly how Catherine loves him, and he knows clearly that this love does not stop her from distancing herself from him, having just disputed this topic with her. As Catherine waits for the Lintons to come, Heathcliff points out how she is spending far less time with him than with them, and Catherine retorts that spending time with him is boring:

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[22] It is worth noting that in the two episodes discussed here (and indeed in several other crucial moments of the narrative) Nelly Dean engages in acts of relaying or deliberately withholding information. Both within and beyond the narrative, she is an unreliable narrator, and in some ways, may even be seen as a manipulator of language. However, as this section focuses on Catherine's primal fear of sonic force, a detailed discussion of Nelly's narrative unreliability must be left aside. For analyses of Nelly's role as an unreliable narrator, see Shunami 449-68 and Hafley 199-215.

> ‘What good do I get – What do you talk about? You might be dumb or a baby for anything you say to amuse me […] ’
>
> ‘You never told me, before, that I talked too little, or that you disliked my company, Cathy!’ exclaimed Heathcliff in much agitation.
>
> ‘It is no company at all, when people know nothing and say nothing,’ she muttered. (70)

Catherine rejects Heathcliff for the same reason that Cathy laughs at Hareton, but unlike Hareton, who acquires a better language largely through Cathy’s help, Heathcliff becomes articulate by leaving Catherine. As Gezari proposes, Heathcliff’s absence from Catherine, ‘not caused by her death but by his own flight from Wuthering Heights, […] may be instrumental to his acquisition of language, since he requires language to mediate what was before an unmediated relation to the world outside him, an unmediated related [*sic*] to Catherine' (116). In any case, Heathcliff must have noticed the problems between him and Catherine as well as problems of his own – he even marks the almanack to show that he '[*does*] take notice' (*WH* 70) – and thus, overhearing part of Catherine's confession is less defining and plot-twisting than it might seem, and Heathcliff's decision results from accumulated tension rather than a single, overheard conversation.

As for the second episode, Nelly is the accepted audience of Catherine and Heathcliff's quarrel, sitting in the kitchen with them, and Edgar is informed of their quarrel through Nelly's disclosure. Here, no overhearing/eavesdropping act exists in the plot development. Rather, it is the idea of this act, or, more precisely, Catherine's belief in and fear of the defining impact of this act, that is curiously emphasised. When Edgar comes down to the kitchen and lambasts Heathcliff for his coarse language (a piece of information provided by Nelly) and criticises Catherine for being comfortable with it, Catherine retorts by accusing him of eavesdropping: 'Have you been listening at the door, Edgar?' (114) Since neither Nelly nor Edgar care to explain, later, when Catherine breaks up with both men in discord, she exclaims to Nelly in frenzied agitation:

> What possessed him to turn listener? Heathcliff's talk was outrageous, after you left us; but I could soon have diverted him from Isabella, and the rest meant nothing. Now, all is dashed wrong by the fool's-craving to hear evil of self that haunts some people like a demon! Had Edgar never gathered our conversation, he would never have been the worse for it. (116)

To be sure, Catherine's complaint is first of all a childish, selfish shirking of responsibility, for she knows clearly that Heathcliff's talk is 'outrageous', and must be diverted. Still, her language curiously associates eavesdropping with a demonic influence or temptation, which deserves some attention. She attributes Edgar's supposed eavesdropping to demonic 'possession', and a 'demonic', 'haunting' impulse to 'hear evil of self'. That she blames the escalation (and probable damnation) of the situation entirely on eavesdropping, along with her peculiar word choice, seems to reveal her belief and fear in a destructive power beyond human control that is embedded in the act of eavesdropping.

Looking back, Catherine's fear in the power of eavesdropping/overhearing stems from her past experience of a similar situation three years earlier. As far as *she* is aware, Heathcliff's leaving must be attributed to him overhearing her confession to Nelly, but she did not recognise the power of this act at that time. At first, when Nelly notices Heathcliff's presence and hushes her, she waves off Nelly's warning nonchalantly: 'Oh, he couldn't overhear me at the door!' (81) As Nelly reveals to her that Heathcliff has indeed overheard her words, she '[jumps] up in a fine fright' and '[runs] to seek for her friend herself' only in vain, for Heathcliff has already left (83). In this sense, the two episodes serve as a pair of causal oppositions in terms of Catherine's attitude towards overhearing: from an unawareness of its destructive power to an exaggerated demonisation of it.

Yet, as previous paragraphs have shown, eavesdropping/overhearing is not the defining factor in both episodes, and the closure of the first episode reveals the real source of the destructive power Catherine fears: not the eavesdropping act, but the unchecked, undetected, transgressive, capricious nature of the sound. Panicked at Heathcliff's disappearance, Catherine feels that she must find him and have a talk: 'I want to speak to him, and I *must*. […] And the gate is open, he is somewhere out of hearing; for he would not reply, though I shouted at the top of the fold as loud as I could' (84, original italics). Catherine's words imply her belief that Heathcliff will surely answer her call as long as he hears it, and the only reason he has not answered it must be that he has not heard it. Whether this belief is sincere or a defensive bravado, it reflects her vague awareness of the frightful nature of sounds. The realisation of Heathcliff's silent overhearing has just revealed to her about the transgressive and treacherous power of sounds: sounds are unbound by material boundaries, and their transmission cannot be checked. The moment a sound is uttered, it goes out of control of the issuer and is bound to be heard. Intangible and instantaneous as it is, its invisible physicality produces a concrete and irreversible impact on its listener. In contrast, the listener (Heathcliff) can prevent himself from being heard in return by keeping silent and not responding to the speaker's 'call'. In their earlier quarrel, Catherine has just disparaged Heathcliff for 'saying nothing', and now, Heathcliff retaliates exactly by 'saying nothing'. Sounds are bound to be heard, but they do not promise a response.

As when Heathcliff's desperate call years later for Catherine's ghost is answered only by whirling snow and wind (see section 1), here, natural sounds are again employed as a replacement for human voices. Catherine's anxious search for Heathcliff is accompanied by the approach of a storm: the 'growling thunder' is followed by a storm 'rattling over the Heights in full fury' and a 'violent wind'. Heedless of the atrocious weather, Catherine remains outdoors, ‘calling at intervals, and then listening, and then crying outright’ (85). As a result, the ‘uproar’ leaves other characters unharmed, except Cathy who is soaked in rain, which soon brings about her serious fever. Similar to the case of Catherine’s ghost years later, when her voice is simultaneously accompanied by and identified with natural sounds, the sound of this raucous storm serves a two-fold function. On the one hand, it is a proxy for Heathcliff’s voice, and the closing scene therefore functions as the symbolic dialogue that Catherine is eager to have with him, a dialogue that is ultimately unfruitful and would unavoidably lead to Catherine’s misery and fever. On the other hand, the storm’s sound is different from Heathcliff’s sound and conceals the latter when he leaves the moor unnoticed. In other words, one sound can be concealed by another sound. Earlier, when the Lintons visit the Heights for the first time, Heathcliff gets into a conflict with Edgar, and is locked into the garret as a punishment. Unable to persuade Hindley to liberate Heathcliff, Catherine must go to her companion stealthily, and she gains cover in the music played out by the Gimmerton band: she says it sounds ‘sweetest at the top of the steps’ and ‘[goes] up in the dark’ unnoticed. Under the cover of music, she first persuades an irritated Heathcliff to ‘hold communion with her through the boards’, and even sneaks into the locked garret. Thus, when Nelly goes to warn Catherine that the music will end soon, ‘instead of finding her outside’, she ‘[hears] her voice within’ (61). The concealing and transgressive power of sounds – especially when one is answered by another – is strong enough to literally pierce through the material boundaries, and lead Catherine across the wall into a locked room.

As it turns out, sounds are transgressive and treacherous, at the same time that they are protective and concealing; boundaries between different sounds are concurrently blurred and kept, and this double-state allows them to mask or hide in each other but also retain individuality. Simultaneously connective and destructive, sounds in the novel build up a complicated soundscape, which illustrates the chaotic power of sound in general, both within the story and at a narrative level. In particular, the close association between Catherine's and Heathcliff's voices and natural sounds, along with Catherine's emphasised anxiety about the demonic, or supernatural nature of the sound, points this chaotic power towards the Romantic idea of the sound, which is important to Brontë's construction of the sound narrative in *Wuthering Heights*.

4. The Unquiet Dead and Sublimity of Sound

Before turning to the main discussion of this section, it is necessary to briefly outline the Romantic conception of sound and Brontë's engagement with it. One of the earliest and most influential articulations of sound in Romantic thought can be traced to Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke's theorisation of the sublime and the beautiful was crucial for the English Romantic movement; he defines the sublime as things that excite the 'strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling', and such emotion, or passion, is 'astonishment' with 'some degree of horror' (59, 95). Among other sensations, sounds have a great power to produce the sublime passion, and here Burke did not mean words/language, but 'excessive loudness', 'low, tremulous, intermitting sound[s]', or 'a sudden beginning, or sudden cessation of sound of any considerable force' (150-4). This interest in and emphasis on sound persisted throughout the Romantic era and especially among Romantic poets. The collection *Sound and Sense in British Romanticism* (2023) edited by James Grande and Carmel Raz examines how sound was reimagined as a central, disruptive, and philosophically charged force in Romantic-era Britain, reshaping understandings of space, time, and sensory experience across literature, music, science, and politics. John Hollander notes a distinct 'auditory attention' in the Romantic imagination during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (7). In her study of musicality and harmony in Wordsworth's poetry, Yimon Lo argues that the 'associative function of sound provides a medium for Wordsworth to bridge the past, present, and future, as he shapes his present expectations for the future with past memories' (11). The Brontë sisters, including Emily, were immersed in Romantic thought from an early age, and numerous scholars have traced the influence of Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, and Wordsworth on their writings.[23] This Romantic attention to sound is clearly carried over into Emily Brontë's works, forming a continuous thread that runs from her early poetry to her later fiction, as will be explored in the last part of this section.

To re-examine the second episode discussed in the last section, when Catherine seeks Nelly to confess her troubled feelings about Edgar and Heathcliff, she finds Nelly rocking Hareton on her knee, and humming a ballad for the infant: 'It was far in the night, and the bairnies grat,/The mither beneath the mools heard that' (*WH* 77). It seems ironic that Catherine cannot hear Heathcliff's presence when he sneaks away from his overhearing/eavesdropping or hear his response to her call later that night, when her repeated failure is preceded by the song of a dead mother hearing her living children's cry. Yet, throughout the novel, there are several crucial occasions on which sounds transgress the boundaries of life and death, the ultimate demonstration of the transgressive, auditory power, and these occasions all centre around Catherine.

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[23] For a detailed account of this topic, see James Quinnell's chapter '"Those shadowy recollections": The Brontës and Romanticim' in *Edinburgh Campanion* 162-74.

In the beginning of volume II, Nelly recounts to Lockwood the day of Catherine's last conversation with Heathcliff, her premature delivery of Cathy, and her death. This eventful spring day opens with pleasant weather, but Catherine, with her sickly, wandering mind, can hardly pay attention to these material conditions:

> Gimmerton chapel bells were still ringing; and the full, mellow flow of the beck in the valley came soothingly on the ear. It was a sweet substitute for the yet absent murmur of the summer foliage, which drowned that music about the Grange when the trees were in leaf. At Wuthering Heights it always sounded on quiet days, following a great thaw or a season of steady rain – and, of Wuthering Heights, Catherine was thinking as she listened; that is, if she thought, or listened, at all. (158)

While this lengthy passage tells of Nelly's cold-blooded and unfeeling personality towards her mistress – she nonchalantly depicts the blissful weather and Catherine's deteriorated state of health in the same sentence – on another level, it also displays part of Brontë's effort to establish a complicated yet univocal soundscape. Here, chapel bells sound concurrently with the valley beck's flow, whereas the beck's flow is drowned by the murmur of summer leaves at Thrushcross Grange, and is strengthened by thaw or rain at Wuthering Heights. The sound of this flow has always reminded Catherine of the Heights after she moves to the Grange after marriage. These sounds connect the kirk, the Grange, and Heights with each other, as well as these creations of culture to nature. They also connect the Catherine of this time with her past self at home from her memory. As different sounds from different places and times merge, they remove the spatial distance between these important locations, and break the boundaries between past and present, mind and reality.

However, at this point, Catherine's unrecognising, dying mind cuts her off from this world of sounds with which she has previously been intimate, and she is only reconnected to it after her death and burial. Although the reader – as well as the narrator – is not informed of Heathcliff's secret action on the night of Catherine's burial until late in the novel, chronologically, this incident takes place soon after the pleasant day described in the above passage. As it turns out, the day of Catherine's burial (a Friday) marks 'the last of our fine days, for a month' (171). From that evening on, the pleasant weather breaks into rain, sleet, and snow, even though it is springtime. On this wintry evening, Heathcliff goes to the Gimmerton Kirk alone, and in a wild yearning for the deceased to return to his embrace, he decides to dig up Catherine's grave. He is about to uncover the coffin when he hears 'a sigh from some one above, close at the edge of the grave, and bending down' (289). He ignores the sound and continues his move, but immediately hears another sigh, this time 'close at [his] ear', which he recounts to Nelly years later:

> I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew

> no living thing in flesh and blood was by – but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on the earth. (290)

This mysterious occurrence stops Heathcliff's grave-digging, and makes him 'unspeakably consoled'. The moment Catherine is buried under the earth, she is absorbed into nature and becomes reconnected to the natural soundscape. As Heathcliff attempts to disturb her eternal slumber by lifting her out of her grave, cutting her link to nature again, she stops him with two sighs. The term 'displace' indicates her double relationship with natural sounds: she is so intimate with them that her breath can take the place of the wind, and yet she is still not part of them, for after all, a breath is not a wind – they are the opposites, with one being warm, and the other freezing.

Initially consoled by the realisation that Catherine's spirit is by his side, Heathcliff soon feels troubled by her haunting presence, not because Catherine is haunting him (he happily accepts this), but because she does *no more than* haunt him. What really agitates Heathcliff is the fact that, in his words: 'I could *almost* see her, and yet I *could not*!' (290, original italics). It is 18 years later, after Edgar's burial, when Heathcliff finally removes Catherine's coffin-lid and sees her face in a *dream* that he feels pacified, albeit only a little (289).

It is curious that Catherine's posthumous auditory message, which has initially consoled Heathcliff so much that it prevents him from uncovering her coffin, leads to his 18-year-long distress. A question naturally arises: why has Heathcliff not heard Catherine's voice again in these eighteen years? He feels her presence everywhere, and particularly in her empty chamber, the 'haunted nucleus of the house', to quote Tarr's phrase (96). Yet he cannot stay long in her chamber, for he feels her presence so intensely that he must look for her, and he must be repeatedly disappointed. It seems that, even in this haunted nucleus, Heathcliff cannot hear Catherine's voice again. However, as irrelevant to the main narrative as he is, the outsider Lockwood hears Catherine the first time he stays in her chamber. In fact, her knocking on the window, which is identified with the fir-bough's tapping sound, is followed not only by her voice, but even her vision. Catherine's spirit tells Lockwood that she has been lost (a 'waif') and locked out of the Heights for twenty years, but Heathcliff apparently has different ideas on this matter. When Lockwood complains to Heathcliff about this horrid haunting experience, Heathcliff '[wrenches] open the lattice' and sobs in desperation: 'hear me *this* time – Catherine, at last!' (28) As discussed in section 1, he is answered with no more than the whirling snow and wind – this time, there is not even a 'warm breath' or a 'sigh'. Heathcliff and Catherine have reversed their roles: while Catherine is the one begging to be heard on the night of Heathcliff's departure, after her death and burial, she now attains the position of the one being called for and choosing whether to answer.

In fact, it may be argued that Heathcliff in those eighteen years is just like Catherine before her death, being is cut off from the natural sounds with which he had once been so intimate; he has been the child of 'heath' and a changeling, after all. It is only when he approaches his own death, that he gradually becomes reconnected to nature, to natural sounds, and to Catherine, since he is heading toward the same destination as her – the grave beside her. The first description of his recognition of Catherine's vision is meaningful: he sees her through the window, and goes to the garden to walk by her. Before, when he opens the lattice of Catherine's chamber, he cannot go through to join her. Astonished at his unusual state, Nelly remarks that his frame shivers 'not as one shivers with chill or weakness, but as *a tight-stretched cord vibrates – a strong thrilling*, rather than trembling' (328, my italics). To approach where Catherine truly is, namely, an invisible world teeming with invisible sounds, Heathcliff must first rediscover the sound in himself. Staying with Catherine's vision, Heathcliff quits food and sleep almost entirely, and he happily welcomes his own demise in no more than three days. On a rainy night, he opens the window in his room, lies in his bed, lets the rain drench him through, and dies open-eyed and smiling. His 'face and throat' are washed with rain; he is finally liberated from the boundaries that have separated him from noisy nature on the night of Lockwood's nightmare. Heathcliff's voice was then only answered by wind and snow, but now, his voice is covered by and absorbed into the rain.

Just as Catherine's voice is capable of penetrating from her grave to the world of the living, she can hear the voice of the living in her demise. Eighteen years after her death, her daughter Cathy falls into Heathcliff's trap: deceived by Linton's excuse, she is tricked into and confined in the Heights for several days, and is forced to marry Linton. Through this marriage, Heathcliff, now her father-in-law, will take legitimate possession of Edgar's property, which will soon be inherited by Cathy after Edgar's imminent death. In her desperation, Cathy persuades Linton to help her, and she makes her last attempt at escaping. In the end, she successfully flees the Heights and returns to the Grange just in time for her last meeting with her father before his death. Unlike her aunt Isabella, who has escaped from the door in the midst of mayhem many years ago, Cathy escapes from Catherine's chamber, which is a significant authorial arrangement: 'She visited the empty chambers, and examined their windows; and, luckily, lighting on her mother's, she got easily out of its lattice, and onto the ground, by means of the fir tree, close by.' (284-5) This scene is not narrated by Cathy herself, but is briefly summarised by Nelly from her third-person narrative voice, and yet it contains crucial symbolic meaning. Cathy has tried the windows in all empty rooms, and her mother's chamber and lattice prove to be the only way out. When she descends to the ground with the help of the fir tree, she is symbolically helped by no one but Catherine herself. For, the image of fir tree is so closely related to, and almost identified with, the figure of Catherine, as is shown in previous analysis. Across a time-span of nearly twenty years, this scene resonates with Nelly's foretelling folksong, and this time, it is not a mockery of Catherine: the dead mother indeed hears her child's distress, and extends her help.

The ending of *Wuthering Heights* provides two opposite views of the dead, making it open to various interpretations. The country folks insist that the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff wander on 'every rainy night', and Nelly herself has witnessed a strange scene where a boy and his sheep are frightened by what he claims to be the ghosts. However, when Lockwood visits their graves outside the now abandoned kirk, he is sure that the dead are at peace:

> I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath, and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through

> the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth. (337)

Carol Jacobs points out that this reassuring, peaceful conclusion contradicts Lockwood’s own encounter with Catherine’s ghost, and that Nelly’s similar sentimentalism ignores Catherine’s confession to her: Catherine views the divine rest as a miserable exile from home. As such, this ending actually puts into question ‘the sense of an ending altogether’ (Jacobs 67). Brazzelli explores how this conclusion may include an opposite interpretation, that there are still ‘desperate, doomed passions’ in evidence which contrast this seemingly ‘quiet scene’ (245-6). Anne William also detects ‘a barely perceptible tension in this equivocal description’ under a seemingly affirmative tone between ‘suffering and calm, tragedy and comedy, unrest and peace, mind and nature, natural and supernatural’ (127). Hillis Miller see this conclusion as proof of Lockwood’s naïveté – his ‘inability to imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in the quiet earth’ when the evidence ‘is there before his eyes’ (59). Although these critics have noted the tension between the calm and the unease in this passage, they have overlooked the fact that this tension is once again mediated through sound. In this moment, sound functions as a connective thread, linking life and death, the human and the natural, a final reiteration and consolidation of the novel’s central themes and its sound narrative. To fully understand the significance and function of sound in this passage – and indeed, throughout the novel – it is necessary to look back to Brontë’s earlier work, and realise how her employment of sound in *Wuthering Heights* is heavily influenced by her Romantic predecessors.

To view the ending paragraph from another perspective, it strangely recalls one of Brontë's poems composed in her youth: 'The linnet in the rocky dells' (*The Complete Poems* 11-2). Narrated from a third-person's perspective in a neutral tone, this poems depicts the tranquil scene of a group of mourners at a lady's grave, with no specification of time, place, or identity of either party. It begins with these lines:

> The linnet in the rocky dells,
> The moor-lark in the air,
> The bee among the heather bells,
> That hide my lady fair. (lines 1-4)

In the next four stanzas, the narrator gives a more comprehensive picture of the scene. On the one hand, the lady has become part of the nature and is feeding it with herself – 'The wild deer browse above her breast' (line 5). On the other hand, her mourners continue to grieve and weep for her. However, the narrator points out, this mourning is meaningless and unnecessary:

> And, if their eyes should watch and weep
> Till sorrow's source were dry,
> She would not, in her tranquil sleep,
> Return a single sigh!
>
> Blow, west-wind, by the lonely mound,
> And murmur, summer-streams—

There is no need of other sound
To soothe my lady's dreams. (lines 21-8)

In the process of composition, it would be natural for an author to (un)consciously recollect fragments from her earlier works. The third line of this poem much resembles Lockwood's remark on 'the moths fluttering among the heath, and hare-bells', and this is not the only similarity. The poem's narrator is objective and cool, just like Lockwood, and what proves to be more relevant between them, is their respective object of narration: the unnamed lady and Catherine. In contrast to Edgar's headstone, which is only 'harmonised by the turf' with 'moss creeping up its foot', and Heathcliff's, which is 'still bare', Catherine's headstone is already 'half buried in heath' (337). Like the unnamed lady, Catherine's death has led her to a half identification with or absorption into nature, and she will only 'return a single sigh' if this 'tranquil sleep' is disturbed by Heathcliff, when he tries to dig her up. Like the unnamed lady, Catherine seems to 'sleep in that quiet earth' with nothing more than the 'soft wind breathing through the grass' to soothe her.

However, as Angela Leighton acutely points out, 'only something unsoothed needs soothing', and that the lady is dreaming unsoothed dreams even in her grave implies that she is a 'still unquiet sleeper' (*Cambridge Companion* 65). This interpretation could explain the two seemingly contrasting reports of Catherine's (and Heathcliff's) death: much as her eternal slumber is soothed by the natural sounds, it also needs eternal soothing, and it is this unsoothed dream of her that roams the land.

It is possible to explain the ending of *Wuthering Heights* by drawing on Brontë's earlier poetry because the novel clearly follows in the vein of the latter. In his analysis of the development of 'vision' in Brontë's poems, Edward Chitham argues that 'many of the concerns of [her] poetry are taken up and deepened in the novel: spirits, dreams and visions are its staple' (120). In fact, another of Brontë's early poems dated June 1837 foretells Catherine's vision in her delirium. 'The night of storms has passed' depicts an evening, during which the narrator experiences a nightmare (*The Complete Poems* 38-40). S/he dreams of standing by a marble tomb, and just as s/he fathoms that this is the time when ghosts would come to grieve for their doom:

> And truly at my side
> I saw a shadowy thing
> Most dim and yet its presence there
> Curdled my blood with ghastly fear
> And ghastlier wondering
>
> My breath I could not draw
> The air seemed ranny
> But still my eyes with maddening gaze
> Were fixed upon its fearful face
> And its were fixed on me (lines 17-26)

This vision renders the narrator paralysed, and culminates in an unearthly sound that 'awoke the stillness reigning round / Faint as a dream but the earth shrank' (lines 44-5).

These stanzas cited above clearly find their resonance in the later *Wuthering Heights*. Having had the quarrel with Heathcliff and Edgar after Heathcliff's return, Catherine suffers a relapse of fever, and in her delirium, she cannot recognise herself in the mirror:

> 'Don't you see that face?' she inquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror. […] so I rose and covered it with a shawl.
>
> 'It's behind there still!' she pursued, anxiously. 'And it stirred. Who is it? […] Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!'
>
> I took her hand in mine, and bid her be composed; for […] she would keep straining her gaze towards the glass.
>
> 'There's nobody here!' I insisted. 'It was yourself, Mrs. Linton; you knew it a while since.'
>
> 'Myself,' she gasped, 'and the clock is striking twelve! It's true, then; that's dreadful!' (123)

Although Catherine's mirror image curdles her blood with 'ghastly fear and ghastlier wondering', she cannot be persuaded to stop looking at it, and as her 'maddening gaze' is fixed upon the reflection's 'fearful face', that of the reflection must be fixed on hers. The sound of the clock striking twelve only proves to her some dreadful truth, which worsened her condition. Yet the 'shadowy thing' is essentially Catherine herself, and thus when Nelly leaves for Edgar, the shawl covering the mirror falls off, and she is summoned back by 'a piercing shriek' – the unearthly sound uttered by Catherine, and therefore by the ghostly reflection.

This scene in the novel corresponds well with the poem, and more examples of such one-to-one mapping might be found under closer inspection, but the point here is that *Wuthering Heights*, both in its scene arrangement and particular use of language, does 'take up and deepen' Brontë's poetry. Such a connection has been noticed by several critics. Swinburne in 1883 argued that 'All the works of the elder sister [Charlotte Brontë] are rich in poetic spirit, poetic feeling, and poetic detail; but the younger sister's work is essentially and definitely a poem in the fullest and most positive sense of the term' (Allott 439-40). Sydney Dobell discussed the poetic power of the novel, comparing the novel to the music of infant Hercules, the 'separate notes' of which 'perhaps sound all the sweeter for the Aeolian discords from which they come' (Allott 279). G. D. Klingopulos suggests that the novel is a dramatic poem in itself (269-86).

Also noticed by critics is the way in which both Brontë's novel and poetry bear evident Romantic affinities. A review by *Britannia* in 1848 first remarked that *Wuthering Heights* bears resemblance to 'irregular German tales'; Émile Montégut in 1857 pinpointed this influence to the German romantic writer Ernst Hoffmann, a view which was later shared by Mary Ward, who also pointed out other German romantic influences on Brontë, such as Goethe's *Dichtung and Wahrheit* (Allott 223, 376, 455-6). Silver detects a parallel between the ending of *Wuthering Heights* and that of *The Black Dwarf* (1816) by Sir Walter Scott: when the dwarfish, fairy-like Elshie vanishes at the end of the story, neither the reader nor the characters are informed of his final state. Some people believe that 'his disappearance is only temporary and that he may be seen among the hills', and identify him with 'the Man of the

Moors' – just like the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine who are sometimes seen roaming the moor (13).

As for the romantic heritage in Brontë's poetry, its 'sources' are more localised. In her biography of Brontë, Mary Robinson not only reiterated 'her acquaintance with German literature, and especially with Hoffmann's tales', but also remarked on the strong affinity Brontë had with Coleridge's poems (Chap. XIV). Through a scrupulous examination of many of Brontë's poems, Chitham argues that they owe much not only to Coleridge, but also Shelley, both in language and ideas.[24] Other critics detect Brontë's affinity with Wordsworth's poetry. Leighton remarks that 'The linnet in the rocky dells' echoes 'Three years she grew' (*Cambridge Companion* 64). Jonathan Wordsworth (85-100), James Quinnell ('Dissonance' 89-103), Steve Vine (99-117), and others have discussed how some of her poems are likely rewritings and/or responses to *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*.

As Brontë's works are heavily influenced by Romantic ideas, the keen focus on, and employment of sounds in *Wuthering Heights* – as well as the recurrent unearthly sounds in her poems – is then partly a result of her Romantic affinity. Lo's argument that sound functions in an associative way that 'bridges the past, present, and future' applies perfectly to the passage analysed at the beginning of this section, which depicts the blissful landscape and soundscape before Catherine's death, and in which different sounds merge together, breaking the temporal and spatial boundaries. Elizabeth Weybright, when analysing the *Grasmere Journal*, calls Dorothy Wordsworth a 'practised and self-aware listener at home in her local soundscape' (325). The same can be said of Emily Brontë, and the whole book of *Wuthering Heights* is its exemplification: since Emily was a brilliant musician, who learnt the piano well enough in Brussels to have her own pupils,[25] it seems natural that she was so keenly aware of the natural soundscape of northern Yorkshire moors. Just as in Dorothy's journal, in *Wuthering Heights*, even when 'sound is not pointed out, it is embedded as an always-present "undersong" in the unfurling experience she recounts' (Weybright 327).

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[24] See *Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems*, 58-76.

Eventually, whether it is William and Dorothy Wordsworth or Emily Brontë, their Romantic concern with the sound and the natural soundscape points back to Burke's conceptualisation of sound as a source that rouses the feeling of sublime. All sorts of Burke's 'sudden', 'horrible', 'astonishing' sounds are found in *Wuthering Heights*: the whirling snow and wind answering Heathcliff's desperate call, the warm breath and ghostly sighs that stops him from digging up Catherine's grave, the tapping of fir-branches, and the soft wind breathing through to soothe the unquiet dead. Sounds in *Wuthering Heights*, as they penetrate the boundaries between life and death, human and nature, time and space, turn out to construct a soundscape of the Romantic sublime.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that, throughout *Wuthering Heights*, different sounds compete with each other at the same time they cover for each other; voices are interchangeable with noises; natural sounds are almost but not entirely identified with human voices, and sounds transgress even the boundary between life and death, but it may simultaneously betray its utterer. Yet, while critics such as Kincaid and Miller focus on the incoherent aspect of the novel’s narrative patterns, sounds in the novel are, despite being heterogenous, ultimately harmonious. Different and contrasting as they may sound, sounds belong fundamentally and literally to an interconnected whole – they are but vibrations of different frequencies. So is the world of *Wuthering Heights* which is established based on this sound narrative: boundaries between apparent binary oppositions may be broken, but it does not lead to a homogeneous harmony, as Lockwood would expect, but only a heterogeneous one, but it is a harmony nonetheless.

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[25] See Robinson, Chap VII.

Chapter Two: A Whisper in the Ear:

Silence and Its Solution in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Critics have long observed an intertextual relationship between *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights*. On a surface level, the two novels exhibit deliberate correspondences: each centre around a house bearing the same initials, and a cluster of major characters whose names begin with the letter H – Helen, Huntingdon, Halford, Hargrave, and Hattersley, paralleled by Heathcliff, Hindley and Hareton. Within the Brontë family, Emily and Anne were known to be particularly close; Ellen Nussey once described them as two 'twins' and 'inseparable companions', and they collaborated in the creation of the Gondal saga (75). However, Edward Chitham, through an analysis of two of Anne's poems composed between 1846 and 1848, suggests that a shift in Anne's thoughts and ideas had occurred during this period, potentially marking a divergence from her twin-like sister. Accordingly, he argues that *The Tenant* (written in 1847 and published in 1848) may be read, at least in part, as a parody of *Wuthering Heights* (written in 1845-6 and published in 1847). Beyond the superficial echoes in places and names, the two novels also share certain thematic similarities, yet Anne approaches these motifs with a different set of ethical and aesthetic assumptions. These deliberate contrasts, Chitham points out, 'are intended to highlight what Anne may have thought of as the inadequacies of her sister's philosophical outlook' (100).[26]

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[26] For detailed comparison of the authors different attitude towards similar character design and plot arrangement between the two novels, such as Markham's/Heathcliff's violence towards Lawrence/Hindley, and adultery of Heathcliff and Arthur Huntingdon, see Chitham 100-4. Also see Gordon 736-7 for a listing of one-to-one correspondence between characters and plot elements.

In terms of narrative structure, *The Tenant* adopts a frame narrative which parallels that of *Wuthering Heights*. Yet again, the resemblance belies fundamental differences in functions between the two. The frame structure of *Wuthering Heights* is heavily influenced by Gothic narrative conventions and serves to demonstrate ambiguity of boundaries, a process also achieved, as the previous chapter has shown, through sound as a narrative. Gender, on the other hand, is not structurally central to the frame narrative: although Lockwood is the framing narrator and his sexual repression is an important factor that affects his narration, it is Nelly's framed narrative that proves to be more crucial.[27] By contrast, the narrative structure in *The Tenant* is more explicitly gender-related, and the central element that appears throughout such a narrative is – unlike the connective, omnipresent sound in *Wuthering Heights* – silence that disconnects every relationship.

The Tenant is framed as a series of letters from Gilbert Markham to his friend and brother-in-law about his life-changing encounter twenty years earlier with Mrs Graham, a woman who takes up the tenancy at the long-vacant Wildfell Hall, accompanied only by her son and a servant. Mrs Graham's seclusion in the neighbourhood soon leads to scandalous gossip around the place, initially about her real identity, later about her possible affair with her landlord Frederick Lawrence. Yet her eccentric air also attracts Gilbert, son of a farmer in Linden-Car village. Pursued by Gilbert, Mrs Graham determines to hand him her diary. In the direct, first-person narrative of the diary which comprises over a third of the novel, the heroine reveals herself as Helen Huntingdon, the long-mistreated wife of Arthur Huntingdon, an alcoholic, debauched aristocrat. To free herself from the marital abuse and to save her son from his father's influence, she eventually escapes to Wildfell Hall and supports herself with her artwork. Following the diary revelation, Helen hears that her husband has been injured in an accident and returns to care for him. His eventual death allows her a new life and marriage to Gilbert. Gilbert's recounting of past events ends here, followed by his prospect of a family reunion at the 'present time' of twenty years later, with which both the letter and the novel closes.

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[27] Nelly not only participates directly in the events she recounts, as an unreliable narrator she also exerts significant control over her narration. Moreover, while Lockwood has met Heathcliff in person, the significant event of the latter's death is relayed by Nelly, rather than witnessed by Lockwood himself; conversely, Lockwood (and thus the reader) experiences a strange, supernatural, face-to-face encounter with Catherine, even though she has been dead for eighteen years at the start of the novel. That is to say, Catherine is less removed from the framing narrator than she appears, and Heathcliff more removed than he appears.

The novel's structure of Gilbert's correspondence enclosing long transcriptions of Helen's diary has attracted highly contrasting critical responses. George Moore, despite praising Brontë's genius, lamented how Helen's diary '[breaks] the story in halves' out of the author's lack of experience. He believes that the author 'must not let [her] heroine give her diary to the young farmer', but should let Helen tell Gilbert her story in person, making it 'an entrancing scene' in order to preserve 'the atmosphere of a passionate and original love story' (216). Terry Eagleton considers the lengthy diary as an 'odd structural inversion', for 'What is officially an interlude becomes the guts of the book, displacing the framework which surrounds it' (136). Other commentators affirm the structure's necessity, but disagree on its function. Juliet McMaster argues that the diary provides the 'dramatic immediacy' necessary to convey the pain and pathos of Helen's experience which is not communicable even through her own verbal retelling (363). Naomi Jacobs contends that the narrative structure in *The Tenant* is, like *Wuthering Heights*, influenced by the gothic narrative frame that 'represents an authorial strategy for dealing with the unacceptability of the subject matter'. In this reading, Gilbert's framing narrative and Helen's framed narrative resemble 'competing works of art', equally crucial. While Helen's narrative reveals a tabooed, shocking reality, Gilbert the framing narrator represents a set of restrictive ideology and official moral standards, and he is shocked by such evil. Yet the contemporary ideology he represents – the oppressive standards of morality and propriety – is also partly the cause of such perversion, and therefore Helen's framed narrative must be fully understood and experienced only when Gilbert's framing narrative and its implied ideology is fully recognised (206-7). Catherine Quirk holds that the enclosure of Helen's diary within Gilbert's letters illustrates her 'inability to escape from patriarchal standards and expectations' (240). Elizabeth Langland proposes that in *The Tenant* 'narrative within a narrative [is organised] not as hierarchical or detachable parts but as interacting functions within a transgressive economy that allows for the paradoxical voicing of feminine desire', and that by telling Helen's story, Gilbert's own narrative become Helen's (34).

Whether assessed positively or negatively, it is now generally accepted that the novel's narrative structure is bound up with the issue of enforced female silence and female voice. For, Helen's diary, which is central to related criticism, has resulted from the heroine's inability to voice her marital suffering due to restrictive social decorum. However, this chapter proposes that, firstly, in *The Tenant*, silence is not only a prominent thematic thread running through discussion about topics including marriage, violence, abuse, education, and emotional repression, but also that it is portrayed as a shared affliction of both women and men, causing damage to individuals and the community. In general, the silence examined in this novel refers to a condition in which emotion and information fail to circulate effectively between individuals. The causes of such silence are manifold and, at times, gender-specific: while both sexes suffer from silence, they suffer from it in different ways. Its consequence, however, is clear: the estrangement of one person from another. Moreover, Brontë does not simply depict silence and trace its origins and consequences; she also tentatively proposes the written and spoken language as a solution, that is, to reconnect isolated individuals. Brontë's intention is not to decide which is primary, but to make full use of both, and ultimately use this approach to 'gain the public ear' and 'whisper a few wholesome truths therein', as she declares in the 'Preface' to the second edition (*TWH* 4). Letters, diaries, conversations, and gossip all serve as partial remedies making up for the rupture caused by this silence; when these remedies are organised as a complex combination of embedded letters and diaries, within which dialogues and gossip are also recorded, they become the author's solution to silence, a public text meant for circulation of complicated narrative structure that is *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The apparently fragmented textual forms and overlapping voices within the novel are not signs of narrative incoherence, but rather contribute to the text's integrity as a whole. In addition, while both written and spoken language have their own limitations, the author acknowledges their flaws while asserting their necessity in resisting silence. The resulting narrative structure is gender-relevant rather than gendered, and Brontë believes it necessary to 'whisper' her lessons to 'the young of both sexes' who are led to 'sin and misery' due to concealing silence and who are 'left to wring their bitter knowledge from experience' (*TWH* 4).

1. Written Language Against Silence

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, written language primarily takes the form of letters and diaries. However, the novel's recourse to the written word as a response to silence goes beyond the surface-level functions of these forms, that is, beyond the fact that characters use letters to communicate emotions with others, or use diaries to record experience and feelings. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of how these two forms of texts operate within the novel, the first point to note is that, *The Tenant* provides a narrative structure that is much more complex than the simplified model of 'Gilbert's correspondence framing Helen's diary'. Rather, the two textual forms are interlaced with each other. At the outmost layer is the epistolary narrative of Gilbert to his brother-in-law, Jack Halford, which encloses not only his transcription of Helen's diary, but also his retelling of later correspondence between Helen and her brother Frederick Lawrence when Helen leaves Wildfell Hall to nurse her husband. Inside the diary – Helen's narrative – are enclosed letters between Helen and her aunt Mrs Maxwell, and between Helen and her close friend Milicent Hattersley (neé Hargrave). To unravel these complex, intertwined layers of texts, one must search for the point where multiple texts collide with each other. The key to understanding the complexity of the novel's frame structure, therefore, lies in the last scene of Chapter 15, when Helen hands her diary to Gilbert to tell him her past and to dispel their misunderstandings at the textual level, and when the narrative voice shifts from Gilbert to Helen at the narrative level. In this scene, Gilbert confronts Helen in person and accuses her of having an affair with Mr Lawrence based on a fragmented conversation he has overheard between the two. Instead of explaining her situation in words, Helen takes out her diary, tears a few pages from the end, and gives it to Gilbert. Asking him to read it before bringing it back to her, she demands: 'don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being'. However, only two paragraphs down, Gilbert announces to Halford in the letter twenty years later that he will transcribe Helen's diary to Halford: 'I have it now before me […] I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents and you shall have the whole, save, perhaps, a few passages here and there […]' (*TWH* 129). The ironic juxtaposition of these two sentences here is undoubtedly an intentional and crucial arrangement by the author. The irony points to the gap, discontinuity, and competition between the two narratives, but also to a hidden collaboration between them.

Superficially, Helen's diary is the direct, detailed inner voice of a woman suffering domestic violence, and hence is the most powerful rejection to her imposed silence. The silence here – which is only one instance of the silence to be discussed in this chapter – is the restrictive state imposed on women, either because they are denied the power to speak, or because their speech is denied an audience, even when they venture to speak. But the diary functions in a far more complex way than this. Helen begins to keep a diary after her first social season in London, when she becomes infatuated with Arthur Huntingdon, an infatuation her aunt disagrees with. In face of ‘warnings of experience’, and through over-confidence in her own judgement, she believes that:

> This paper [diary] will serve instead of a confidential friend into whose ear I might pour forth the overflowings of my heart. It will not sympathise with my distresses, but then, it will not laugh at them, and, if I keep it close, it cannot tell again; so it is, perhaps, the best friend I could have for the purpose. (*TWH* 154)

At its very centre, the diary is a private voice, supposed to remain unknown to anyone else, and is less a rejection to external imposition than an affirmation of her internal existence. Jacobs remarks that after Helen finds out about and suffers from Arthur’s debauchery in their marriage, she affirms the reality of her experience through writing it down, and by ‘making visible the invisible’ she speaks her forbidden rage and ‘breaks out of her emotional prison’ (213). Yet Helen speaks her forbidden rage exactly because she knows her words will remain private, for the diary ‘cannot tell again’; she makes the invisible visible, but only to herself. Before she decides to hand the diary to another person and thus making it public, the text is a self-echoing voice that speaks aloud only in her private space, significant not in its expression of forbidden emotions (which invites an external listener), but in its assertion of Helen’s subjectivity.

Priti Joshi points out that Brontë’s use of the diary as a narrative device indicates ‘her protagonists’ faith in the written word’ and her canny approach to reflecting this faith (914). Nevertheless, the diary’s confidentiality proves to be vulnerable. Just as Helen starts to plan her ‘scheme of escape’, on one evening, her diary is noticed, taken away, and read by Arthur. Ironically, it is precisely because she gets too absorbed in writing the diary that she does not realise Arthur’s approaching, in turn revealing her secret writing. In this case, her private voice is exposed unwantedly to a ‘public’ that will harm her through the knowledge of her inner thoughts. Having realised her plan, Arthur destroys her painting materials with which she intends to support herself, and confiscates her money and jewels, which renders her more powerless than ever before. While Helen’s misadventure results ultimately from the suppressing, exploiting institution of marriage and the deceptive ideal of domestic bliss, here in the novel, the author arranges this dramatic moment in such a way that the secret diary – created to help its owner – eventually betrays its owner, and exactly due to its owner’s attention on it. Such an arrangement draws attention to the dilemma of voicing – becoming visible means also to become vulnerable.

This dilemma is reflected not only in Helen’s diary, but also in another form of written records, albeit in a broader sense: her paintings. Having become infatuated with Arthur, Helen inadvertently reveals her feelings when Arthur discovers, on the back of one of her landscape paintings, a sketch of his own face that she forgot to rub out. Upon finding the sketch, Arthur declares that he will now examine both sides of all her paintings. Although Helen initially believes she has ‘carefully obliterated all such witnesses of [her] infatuation’, it turns out that ‘the pencil frequently leaves an impression upon cardboard that no amount of rubbing can efface’, which proves to Arthur Helen’s love for him (*TWH* 155-6). What’s more, this moment is echoed years later, when Helen flees her husband and takes refuge at Wildfell

Hall under the name of Mrs Graham. As Gilbert enters her studio for the first time, he notices a publicly displayed portrait of little Arthur, and behind it he discovers a smaller painting turned towards the wall. When he lifts and reveals it, he in effect performs the same action Arthur once did: looking at the hidden verso of the painting. The result is similar: he uncovers a portrait of Arthur Huntingdon and, with it, Helen's privacy that she is not willing to disclose (*TWH* 48-9). These two scenes form a clear narrative parallel, and it should be noted that Helen began to paint Arthur on the back of her paintings at the same time when she begins to keep a diary. Both acts emerge from a context in which her feelings could not be openly expressed, or, when expressed, is disapproved. Moreover, both her diary and the back of her paintings are not intended for public display. Yet again, the outcome of these acts, intended only for self-affirmation, points to the dilemma of the seemingly private, written word.

Brontë concludes this dilemma through Arthur's ridicule of Helen's writing: 'It's well you couldn't keep your own secret – ha, ha! It's well these women must be blabbing – if they haven't a friend to talk to, they must whisper their secrets to the fishes, or write them on the sand or something…' (367) His words reveals the causal relationship between this gendered silence and writing: it is due to isolation-induced silence that women turn to writing to voice their inner world, and they voice it through a whisper instead of a roar, which is less powerful but more secretive. However, as it turns out, even a whisper is possible to harm them. Still, Helen continues her diary-writing, for the affirmation of self remains essential. Similarly, even though Helen is well aware that she must rub out the sketches on the back of her drawings, she cannot help drawing them in the first place; years later, while she could have destroyed the painting of Arthur, she chooses to hide it in the studio, making it improbable, but not impossible to be discovered. When Helen finds out about Arthur's adultery and when her demand for leaving him is waved off, she can only let out her pain by affirming its existence, that is, by writing it down:

> I have found relief in describing the very circumstances that have destroyed my peace, as well as the little trivial details attendant upon their discovery. No sleep I could have got this night would have done so much towards composing my mind, and preparing me to meet the trials of the day. I fancy so, at least; and yet, when I cease writing, I find my head aches terribly […] (*TWH* 307)

Given that the silence explored in *The Tenant* is defined as a state of interpersonal severance, Helen's act of materialising her forbidden feelings through diary and painting cannot, in itself, be said to break that silence. To be sure, her decision to continue journaling even after Arthur's destructive discovery of her diary suggests that, aside from seeking emotional relief, she seems to harbour a latent desire to be discovered by continuing to write her diary (an action echoed in her choice to keep the painting in her studio rather than destroy it). Yet this somewhat passive desire to break the silence remains unarticulated, and both the diary and the paintings are uncovered by accident rather than design. It is only when Helen deliberately hands her diary to Gilbert that she acts with conscious intent, concrete agency, and a clear communicative purpose, marking her first genuine attempt to break the silence. In doing so, she admits him to her experience and reveals her most private feelings about such experience, which is both intimate and courageous. At this point, she is indeed expressing her forbidden emotions and breaking the general female silence, imposed upon by the middle-class social decorum represented in the figure of Gilbert.

Yet from the reader's perspective, Helen's willing exposure of the diary to Gilbert happens concurrently with his transcription of it to a wider public (Halford) twenty years later, and his transcription is very likely unauthorised. At the beginning of the novel, Gilbert writes to Halford, describing his whereabouts:

> It is a soaking, rainy day, *the family are absent on a visit, I am alone in my library*, and have been looking over certain musty old letters and papers, and musing on past times; so that I am now in a very proper frame of mind for amusing you with an old world story. (*TWH* 10, my italics)

This opening hints that his action is without Helen's permission, or at least, without her knowledge. More importantly, the juxtaposition of 'don't breathe a word' and 'you shall have the whole' on the same page at the end of chapter 15 creates an immediate irony that voices aloud the author's invitation for the reader to delve into Gilbert's action.

This anachronistic parallel of events points to the complexity of Gilbert's transcription: by framing Helen's narrative into a male, middle-class voice, Gilbert legitimises this female, rebellious voice, and is able to spread it to a greater public. Yet, the voice expressed is then a voice compromised and insulated. Besides the several pages torn away by Helen (which betray her initial impression of Gilbert), Gilbert himself has apparently edited the remainder of the diary, deleting 'a few passages here and there of merely temporal interest to the writer, or such as would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate it' (*TWH* 129). According to Meghan Bullock, this insulation is 'one way in which Anne herself silences Helen in the text', which in turn undermines the power of Helen's narrative (135). However, the logic here could also be put the other way round, when the narrative structure of the novel is examined within its intertextual relationship with the novel-writing itself. That Helen's story is told through the voice of Gilbert with a text edited by the latter, is an echo of how *The Tenant* is told by Anne Brontë through the voice of Acton Bell. As Jacobs points out, the Brontës' male personae feature 'comic qualities' that suggests the sisters are using them as a 'mockery of masculinity' which liberates them from the 'restrictive ideology and consciousness for which the personae speak', rather than simply enlarging themselves.[28] In such, Anne uses her male impersonation as 'a way to silence the dominant culture by stealing its voice' (207-8). Following the same line, Gilbert can be seen as Helen's 'male personae', in the sense that when he is supposed to tell Halford his own most remarkable occurrence in his life as a 'return of confidence' to the latter, he instead spends a larger part recounting a woman's life experience and inner feelings (*TWH* 9). In this reading, the frame structure contaminates the public voice with a private one. In fact, both readings are valid here, and it is precisely the dynamic competition between the two narratives that highlights the 'female voice' itself, presented in the materiality of Helen's diary.

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[28] Charlotte Brontë stated in the 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell' in the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* that they had chosen the ambiguous pen names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton out of 'conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine' (*WH* xl). Based on Winifred Gérin's argument, Marianne Thormählen establishes that Brontë sisters have actually acquired these three pseudonyms from the surnames of three contemporary female writers. See Thormählen, 'The Bronte pseudonyms'.

To summarise, insomuch as Helen's act of diary-writing constitutes a vital form of self-affirmation, the written word only begins to counteract the isolating silence when she relinquishes the diary to Gilbert. At the close of Chapter 15, where two narrative voices of two different written forms, composed by individuals of two genders intersect, this breach of silence and the communication of voices occur simultaneously on three levels: first, in the transfer of diary from Helen to Gilbert; second, through Gilbert's letter to Halford twenty years later; and finally, from within the novel to the external reader.

When revisiting the formal question of the novel's narrative structure, the minor character of Gilbert's correspondent, Halford, is less dwelt upon, and is sometimes dismissed as having 'no function other than to receive Markham's letters and never appears in person' (Davies 501). However, Grace Pregent notes that '[the] existence of Halford as the actual listener and intended recipient of the narrative creates a clear distinction between the narratee and the implied reader as well as the actual reader' (221). Although Halford never appears or speaks throughout the narrative, he is a character with his own personality and experience. From the opening paragraphs – those between Brontë's Preface and chapter 1, and which begins with 'Dear Halford' – the reader is told that Halford is a taciturn, old friend of Gilbert Markham, and that the whole novel is Gilbert's epistolary apology to Halford, in response to the latter's unanswered request of 'a return of confidence'. Through the narrator's direct address to Halford in chapter 1, Gilbert reveals that Halford is his brother-in-law, and reiterates the two men's deep friendship:

> I need not tell you this was my sister Rose. She is […] no less lovely – in *your* eyes – than on the happy day you first beheld her. Nothing told me then that she, a few years hence, would be the wife of one entirely unknown to me as yet, but destined hereafter to become a closer friend than even herself […] (*TWH* 12, original italics)

The narrative closes with Gilbert's claim to Halford that he and Helen are 'looking forward to the advent of you and Rose' for their annual visit, reminding the reader of Halford's curious position at the border of the narrative: he takes no part in the story, but is close with the narrator and even the narrator's family (*TWH* 489). Instead of talking directly to the implied 'dear reader', as is common in nineteenth-century fictions, and especially common in her sister Charlotte's novels, Anne let her hero Gilbert talk directly to Halford throughout his narration: 'Halford, I bid you adieu for the present' (21), 'Is it so, Halford?' (58), and 'Halford, what do you think of all this?' (397), just to name a few. At these moments, the actual reader is reminded of the narratee/character Halford and thus their own existence which is not Halford, an awareness that breaks the boundaries between fiction and reality, sending Helen's voice to an even wider audience than Gilbert and Halford, although at the cost of Helen's text being edited and at the risk of its female voice being compromised by a male narrator. In such, Brontë provides an early rebuttal to Charles Kingsley's later review in 1849. The publication of *The Tenant* received much censure, centred mostly around its 'coarseness' and how it 'detail[s] with offensive minuteness … disgusting scenes of debauchery, blasphemy and profaneness' (Allott 267-8). Kingsley, however, deemed it a 'powerful and interesting book', and he did not complain about the choice of the novel's subject, for he believed in the necessity to expose such evil in the English society. Nevertheless, he did argue that certain details create 'unnecessary coarseness', which in his opinion became a defect which '[injured] the real usefulness and real worth of the book'. He particularly criticised the insertion of Helen's lengthy diary with 'written oaths and curses' and 'details of drunken scenes', arguing that it was implausible for Helen to have had the composure or inclination to record such experiences under those circumstances. In his view, this narrative choice reflected the author's excessive concern with artistic detail at the expense of character consistency. More significantly, he contended that the author seemed to forget that 'there are silences more pathetic than all words', suggesting that the inclusion of these details undermined the novel's thematic and emotional impact. Yet, as previous analysis have shown, this is exactly a silence that Brontë rejects, and she rejects it by making a voice penetrate from a private space first into semi-public, then into public, and from fiction into social reality (Allott 269-73).

Apart from Helen's diary, the other main form of text found in the novel are letters. Unlike diaries which are inherently private, epistles are intended for communication, for creating and maintaining bonds, and for linking different voices. Still, letters in *The Tenant* operate in ways that are much more complex. Out of all the direct transcriptions and indirect retellings of letters throughout the novel, three sets of them are more significant that others and require closer inspection: those between Helen and Milicent, that are situated within Helen's diary narrative, those between Helen and Gilbert (initially via the mediation of

Lawrence), situated within Gilbert's epistolary narrative, and those between Gilbert and Halford, which they themselves form Gilbert's epistolary narrative. While the diary breaks the silence through its transfer from the private to the public, the three sets of letters exhibit a different approach to silence. First, the very act of correspondence signals an intention to communicate and exchange feelings and experiences. Yet, when it comes to the subjects that most urgently require or desire expression, the correspondents remain silent or evasive. In this sense, the letters fail to fulfil their most fundamental communicative function. And yet, paradoxically, the silence and evasion themselves become a type of shared experience, which in effect achieves a kind of communication through silence.[29]

In *The Tenant*, Helen and Milicent seem to be the only friend each has, and yet they are silent in the face of each other in terms of their private life. Though they are each other's closest confidantes, their communication is profoundly shaped and in some ways hindered by silence, which stems from the social constructions of shame and moral decorum imposed on women. In fact, while they correspond with each other frequently, they communicate their marital suffering through their mutual silence about this topic. Just as Helen realises belatedly her husband's moral depravity, Milicent writes to Helen to ask anxiously for advice on her impending but unwanted marriage with Hattersley. While Milicent's letter is transcribed fully in Helen's diary, one can only assume how Helen has responded to it. Helen claims in the diary that it is 'better to make a bold stand […] than to devote your whole life, hereafter, to misery and vain regret', but since Milicent asks only for advice 'on the right side', it is very likely that Helen cannot give this heartfelt advice, but can only stay silent on this matter (*TWH* 223). Her silence must have influenced Milicent, for, after Milicent's marriage, the latter adopts a similar, evasive attitude towards the misery in marriage in her letters to Helen:

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[29] Helen and Gilbert's initial indirect correspondence via Lawrence functions in a structurally analogous way, which will be discussed shortly.

> [Milicent] either is, or *pretends* to be, quite reconciled to her lot. She professes to have discovered numberless virtues and perfections in her husband, some of which, I [Helen] fear, less partial eyes would fail to distinguish, though they sought them carefully with tears. (*TWH* 227, my italics)

Although both women try their best to deceive themselves and each other through silence on their marital suffering, they know clearly what they are keeping silent about. Later, when Helen cannot but reprimand Arthur's bad influence on Hattersley based on 'several letters' from Milicent, whose life has been reduced to a 'curse' to herself because of her husband, she declares that 'as for her misery, I rather *feel* it rather than *see* it expressed in her letters' (258, original italics). Helen feels Milicent's misery without her explicitly saying it not because she is perceptive enough, but because she is confined in the same situation, and she does not 'see it expressed' since they are both 'far too deeply ashamed of the errors and vices of our other halves, to make them the common subject of our correspondence' (259). However, Arthur's reaction to their silent communication, though malicious and wrong, does provide a new perspective to it: 'And so *that* is the way you go on – heartening each other up to mutiny, and abusing each other's partners, and throwing out implications against your own, to the mutual gratification of both!' (259) Although they are silent about their mistreatment, the mutual recognition of each other's forced silence and its implication is enough to connect them, creating a friendship that is more powerful than it originally appears. Later, during her visit to Grassdale, in an effort to guide her younger sister, Esther Hargrave, in making a future marital decision, Milicent initiates a candid conversation with Helen, one in which both women more or less confront the failures of their respective marriages. Reflecting on this exchange, Helen observes in her diary that they feel more sorrow for each other's misfortunes than for their own: 'How odd it is that we so often weep for each other's distresses, when we shed not a tear for our own!' (*TWH* 284)

Later in the novel, Helen and Gilbert communicate with each other through a similar silence, but in a different context, and with different consequences. Having dispelled their misunderstandings through the revelation of Helen's history via the diary and confessed their mutual affection for each other, Helen, however, demands that Gilbert keep his distance from her and cut off any direct correspondence between them until six months later, in order to help her in her 'struggle of right against passion'. Before then, they must only 'hear of each other through [Helen's] brother' (*TWH* 401). This self-imposed restriction inevitably hinders their communication, but at this stage their affection *per se* is able to connect them: Gilbert is content simply by keeping Helen's first letter to Lawrence to himself (even though he is not the recipient and she never mentions him throughout), for 'the characters' have been 'written by her hand', and 'the words' have been 'conceived in her mind' and 'spoken by her lips' (430). At this moment, the epistle becomes the avatar of its writer, regardless of its content, and their mutual silence on their relationship (or, on Helen's side, even her silence on the mention of Gilbert) does not affect their mutual affection.

However, when Helen's letters cease following Arthur's death, Gilbert does not choose to initiate correspondence with her, disheartened by the fact that Helen does not mention him explicitly in her previous letters. In the novel's final episode, prompted by the mistaken belief that Helen is to get married, Gilbert visits her in a moment of emotional impulse. Their ensuing conversation, in which misunderstandings are dispelled and feelings confessed, reveals a fundamental divergence in their understanding of silence within epistolary exchange. When Helen asks Gilbert why he has not written to her, Gilbert answers awkwardly: 'I would have done so […] if I could have ventured to believe that you expected to hear from me […] but your silence naturally led me to conclude myself forgotten' (*TWH* 481). For Helen, the silences and evasions in her correspondence with Milicent do not hinder mutual understanding; they remain capable of reading each other's circumstances beyond what is stated. However, for Gilbert, who is emotionally stunted, such silence becomes a definitive barrier, obstructing both comprehension and expression.

To better understand Gilbert's emotional reticence, it is necessary to return to his correspondence with his brother-in-law, Halford. Compared with the former two sets of letters, those between Gilbert and Halford are more special, not only because they construct the framing narrative of the novel, but also because on this occasion there are only one-sided letters from Gilbert to Halford, and one can only deduce Halford's character and voice from Gilbert's biased description. According to Gilbert, the reason for these letters – and thus the story as a whole – is an attempt to 'atone' for the injury he has brought to Halford at their last meeting, when Halford – who is 'not naturally communicative' – shared a confidence and requested a story in return but got rejected. In the letter, Gilbert admits that he has made excuses for not sharing his own story: ‘Not being in a story-telling humour at the time, I declined, under the plea of having nothing to tell, and like shuffling excuses’ (*TWH* 9). Unlike Halford, who is able to confide to a close friend despite being not ‘communicative’, Gilbert is emotionally awkward even after twenty years of marriage, and his silence about his own emotional experience is the consequence of conventional masculinity, which deems ‘the process of emotionally revealing himself’ as ‘a gesture labelled “feminine”’ (Joshi 918). To bypass this defect in character and reconciliate with Halford, Gilbert therefore writes letters that focus not on his own life, but on the life of his wife, albeit without permission. In a way, the abundant emotion expressed by Helen compensates for its lack in Gilbert. As such, Gilbert’s ‘masculine silence’ is dealt with, and he becomes able to talk ‘immutably’ to Halford through letters (*TWH* 21), which according to Deborah Morse comprises ‘an act of intimacy and good fellowship between men’ (105), and eliminates the rift of silence between them.

Moreover, one easily overlooked detail appears in the opening paragraphs preceding chapter 1 of *The Tenant*, when Gilbert explains to Halford about the source of his story: ‘Among the letters and papers I spoke of, there is a certain faded old journal of mine […]’ (*TWH* 10). While Gilbert makes this passing mention to assure Halford that his narrative is not derived solely from memory, it bears far-reaching significance, in that it points to the fact that, it is not only Helen’s, but also his own private narrative that is made public. Indeed, Gilbert’s narrative contains numerous retrospective reflections on his youthful impetuousness and emotional naïveté. That he is able to narrate to Halford (and the reader) his feelings and thoughts twenty years earlier in detail implies that he has, to some extent, overcome his emotional reticence and begun to open himself up. Still, his opening up is structurally dependent on Helen's narrative: while her diary – with its clear formal boundaries – forms the centre of his narration, Gilbert's own 'diary', so to speak, is scattered within his retrospective account surrounding it, and its quality as an initially private text is intentionally ignored, perhaps still betraying a residual discomfort with the candid expression of his own feelings.

Taken together, the diary and the letter, which are the two distinct forms of written language in the novel, serve to expose and respond to interpersonal silence and estrangement, albeit in different ways. This silence exists between both women and men, but its causes, manifestations, and modes of resolution differ markedly. Between Helen and Milicent, silence, which is rooted in social constructions of shame and moral decorum imposed on women, initially delays the formation of emotional solidarity. Yet, despite its constraints, a tacit understanding and mutual support is eventually established based on such silence. In contrast, emotional silence between men constitutes a far more entrenched impediment to relational development. As it turns out, such distance may occasionally be mitigated through the framework of marriage, but it is not achieved through the so-called reformative influence of women, which is a notion that Brontë outright critiques through her heroine's misery in marriage. Instead, *The Tenant* suggests that for men, the value of marriage lies in the fact that it provides a chance for them to stay close to female community and/or stay away from the 'gentlemen's club', and therefore provides them an access to a form of oral language commonly coded as belonging to the women's sphere: the gossip.

2. Spoken Language Against Silence

In his essay on *The Tenant*, Jan B. Gordon provides a comprehensive analysis of gossip. He argues that gossip, which is a 'depersonalised speech act', 'devalues' and 'threatens cultural values as it establishes its textuality', and that Helen, who is unwillingly becoming a 'character' in other people's words, eventually makes a partly successful attempt to use textual forms (her diary and letters) to take control of her life (723-5). Following Heidegger, Gordon defines gossip as a kind of 'metalanguage' that circulates and floats about the culture, which 'has no authorship that can be readily identified' and which is 'a speculative language thrown out at that which is only incompletely understood, and its origins can never be traced or determined' (722). Since every participant in gossip functions merely as a mediator, no participant can be identified as the origin and thus nobody is held responsible. According to this definition, gossip seems easily distinguishable from dialogues between identifiable interlocutors – such as Helen's conversations with Aunt Maxwell, with Milicent, or with Gilbert. However, this section proposes that even dialogues which appear private and participant-bound are ultimately absorbed into the structure of gossip. The boundary between private conversations and gossip is less rigid than it seems; rather, these two forms of oral language can be understood as opposite ends of a continuum. In private dialogues, speakers sometimes refer to rumours they have heard or overheard; others pass on information witnessed first-hand, thereby themselves initiating the first link in the chain of gossip. From private dialogues to overheard conversations that take place in the middle of the private and public space, and at last to the ‘shocking reports’ and ‘idle slander’ (*TWH* 77-8), that is, to the gossip typified in Linden-Car, multiple forms of spoken language emerge as an extended, interlinked soundscape – a collective sonic form that counteracts interpersonal silence. Like diaries and letters, gossip and dialogues operate as responses to isolating silence, and these oral forms of language share similar limitations with their written counterparts as well as having distinct features.

Conversations in *The Tenant* face a predicament that is somewhat similar to that of its written-form counterpart, the epistolary communication in the novel. While they are supposed to enhance understanding between the participants, various sentiments frequently build up a barrier in-between, and words are either heard but not understood (or misunderstood), or they are constantly ignored. Helen’s diary begins with Aunt Maxwell’s ‘warnings of experience’ to her, a conversation that proves to be futile. Preparing Helen for her first social season in London, Aunt Maxwell gives her lengthy advice on marriage:

> ‘Now I want to warn you, Helen, of these things, and to exhort you to be watchful and circumspect from the very commencement of your career […]’
>
> […]
>
> ‘Have *you* been troubled in that way, aunt?’
>
> ‘No, Helen,’ said she, with reproachful gravity, ‘but I know many that have; some, through carelessness, have been the wretched victims of deceit; and

> some, through weakness, have fallen into snares and temptations terrible to relate.'
>
> […]
>
> 'Believe me, *matrimony is a serious thing*.' And she spoke it *so* seriously that one might have fancied she had known it to her cost; but I asked no more impertinent questions, and merely answered … (131-2, original italics)

Helen, out of over-confidence in her clear perception of people which should help her find an ideal husband, does not take her aunt's warning to heart, and admits that 'I was vexed at her incredulity; but I am not sure her doubts were entirely without sagacity; I fear I have found it much easier to remember her advice than to profit by it' (133). Even so, she has sensed the untold truthfulness in this warning, for though Aunt Maxwell adamantly denies that she has any regretful experience in her marriage, Helen fancies that 'she had known it to her cost'. Yet, Helen asks no more impertinent questions, for the motherly woman has already conveyed an evasive attitude on her personal marital life, an attitude that undermines the persuasiveness of her warnings.

When Helen becomes infatuated with Arthur soon after, and boasts that she can and she will 'do much for his salvation', should he really have the flaws he is rumoured to have, Aunt Maxwell cannot but break her silence a little, voicing her misery in marriage through a 'whisper' :

> 'Well my dear, ask your uncle what sort of company he keeps, and if he is not banded with a set of loose, profligate young men […]'

> 'Then, I will save him from them.'
>
> 'Oh, Helen, Helen! you little know the misery of uniting your fortunes to such a man!' (150)

Aunt Maxwell's belated and limited confession is not sufficient to stop a young woman already in love. Should she have voiced this intimate and personal pain earlier and more thoroughly when she first gives advice to her niece, Helen might have hesitated in face of her relationship with Arthur. As it is, her words are first too reserved to be understood, and then too late to be listened to. To some extent, this crucial yet unsuccessful conversation anticipates Helen's future misery. On the one hand, Aunt Maxwell 'serves as Helen's model for how to deal with marital troubles: silence' (Bullock 136). On the other hand, Helen's initial ignorance of her aunt's warnings in her early days causes her to refrain from asking her aunt for help after her marriage, for apart from the 'just determination to bear [her] self-imposed burden alone', there is a 'pride' that makes her 'anxious to appear satisfied with [her] lot' (264). While their conversation is supposed to convey 'warnings of experience' and benefit the younger generation, in reality it only brings about rupture.

Additionally, what is also noteworthy about these two private conversations is how Aunt Maxwell employs gossip as evidence in support of her warnings. Initially, when Helen asks if Aunt Maxwell herself has undergone the sort of marital misery she warns about, the latter denies but claims that she 'knows many that have' – almost certainly through gossip between acquaintances. Later, trying to dissuade Helen from her infatuation with Arthur, Aunt Maxwell first refers to words from her husband that Arthur is 'wildish', then to his affair with a married lady that ‘Miss Wilmot herself was telling [Helen] the other day’ (*TWH* 135, 149). While the first example is not a piece of gossip with unidentifiable source in its strict sense, it is clear that both the author and the characters treat it in the same way as Annabella’s gossip; Aunt Maxwell uses both to discourage Helen’s love, and Helen distrusts both.

Helen is not alone in her disbelief in gossip, and in Gilbert’s case, it seems that his dismissal of ‘idle slander’ is reasonable, for the rumour about Helen and Lawrence’s affair is indeed groundless allegation. However, as it turns out, gossip functions as a significant mode of information, containing both truth and fabrication. Yet, both Helen and Gilbert underestimate its power and overlook its value.

In *The Tenant*, the two crucial scenes of ‘discovery’ – Helen’s discovery of Arthur’s affair with Annabella, and Gilbert’s false discovery of Helen’s ‘affair’ with Lawrence – form a striking narrative parallel. Both initially dismiss the gossip they have heard and choose instead to seek ‘direct’ evidence – only to arrive at opposite outcomes. At Grassdale, Helen realises her maid Rachel’s bad mood and, after pressing her for detail, she receives an outright warning: ‘if I was you, I wouldn’t have that Lady Lowborough in the house another minute – not another *minute* I wouldn’t!’ (*TWH* 298) Believing these words to be ‘idle rumour’ of the servants, Helen is soon confronted again with Walter Hargrave’s near-explicit insinuations: Hargrave recounts to her a conversation he has overheard between Grimsby and Arthur, in which Grimsby explains how he will help arrange the rendezvous for Arthur and a certain lady. Still, Helen does not believe his words completely, and opts for immediate, personal verification, only to hear her husband's affair with Annabella with her own ears.

In Linden-Car, Gilbert hears rumours circulating in the community suggesting that Helen and Lawrence are lovers, which he dismisses them as 'the poison of detracting tongues', 'the calumnies of malicious tongues', 'vile constructions', 'lying inventions', and 'detestable falsehoods' (84, 102, 103). However, when Gilbert, out of his affection for Helen, 'vault[s] over the barrier' of Wildfell Hall – thus intruding into the privacy of domestic space – to take a glance of her, he overhears her conversation with Lawrence, and witnesses their intimate interaction, which leads him to believe they have an affair, and assaults Lawrence. In his later confrontation with Helen, he states his belief in the evidence of his own ears and eyes, an attitude he shares with Helen:

> 'And how much of our conversation did you hear?'
>
> 'I heard quite enough, Helen. And it was well for me that I did hear it; for nothing less could have cured my infatuation. I always said and thought, that I would never believe a word against you, unless I heard it from your own lips …' (*TWH* 127)

And when Helen asks him to listen to her defence for herself, he dismisses that 'You could not have enlightened me farther […] nor could you have made me discredit *the evidence of my senses*' (128, my italics). Yet as it turns out, Gilbert is indeed mistaken, and Lawrence is in fact Helen's brother.

In these two episodes, the gossip in question turns out to be true in one case and false in the other. Yet in each instance, the character chooses not to rely on hearsay, instead seeking direct, first-hand evidence. One ultimately arrives at a correct conclusion based on this evidence; the other, however, reaches an erroneous one. This divergence seems to betray an inconsistency in the author's attitude towards gossip. Yet, if Helen's and Gilbert's action of overhearing/eavesdropping are understood as the first link in the construction of the chain of gossip, then both scenes can be read as demonstration of the essential nature of gossip. At its core, gossip is characterised by instability and uncertainty: it is neither inherently true nor false, full nor partial – but always potent. Both Helen and Gilbert fail to recognise this potency, perceiving gossip merely as harmful rather than asking how it might be properly understood or even strategically deployed.

In contrast, Walter Hargrave clearly grasps the potential of gossip and consciously weaponises it against Helen. As a selfish admirer, Hargrave attempts to persuade Helen to accept his courtship, in spite of Helen's repeated rejection. With only two of them in the library, and determined to make Helen give in, he kneels before Helen, and notices a witness outside the window:

> 'That is Grimsby,' said he deliberately. 'He will *report what he has seen* to Huntingdon and all the rest, *with such embellishments as he thinks proper*. […] He will give such *a version of this story* as will leave no doubt at all about your character, in the minds of those who hear it. Your fair fame is gone; and nothing that I or you can say can ever retrieve it. But give me the power to

> protect you, and show me the villain that dares to insult!' (*TWH* 357, my italics)

Hargrave's words acutely point out that gossip is a blend of 'evidence of senses' and speculative inferences, truth and falsehood. When used with malicious intent, it can become a fictional narrative built upon factual elements; yet in certain circumstances, it may also serve as a valuable tool to assist others, such as the gossip Aunt Maxwell hears about Arthur's debauchery. Both Helen and Gilbert choose to distance themselves from gossip, actively severing the channels through which it circulates. However, this withdrawal does not shield them from its influence. On the contrary, it prevents them from recognising, at the earliest moment, the potentially significant information embedded within it.

Gossip, as a collective form of oral language developed from countless interlinked conversational fragments, possesses an inherently social dimension. Gossip connects the community. As Joshi observes, while gossip has long been associated with 'women and danger', in *The Tenant*, it is less gendered than classed (910). Gossip in Linden-Car, for instance, is not 'exclusively feminine', for Gilbert and the vicar Reverend Millward joins every conversation, although Gilbert is not deeply active or involved. She contends that 'the gossip of middle-class Linden-Car functions not as a critique of the behaviour, but rather to heighten its contrast with the chilling atmosphere of the upper-class estate' (910). While *The Tenant* offers a sharp indictment of the moral failings of upper-class men, the novel also suggests that it is the upper class community's refusal to engage in gossip that reinforces interpersonal alienation and encourages elite male misconduct.

On one hand, in place of emotional and intellectual exchange through oral and written languages, the 'gentlemen's club' is maintained through violence and debauchery. From his surname, Arthur *Huntingdon* is associated with the killing sport. Shortly after Helen become acquainted with him, Arthur returns from hunting 'all spattered and splashed' and 'stained with the blood of his prey' (*TWH* 161). After his marriage with Helen, Arthur invites his debauched club and his mistress Annabella to Grassdale for the first time with the coming shooting season as an excuse (*TWH* 226). Judith E. Pike observes that, 'violence against animals along with the field sports of hunting and shooting are readily associated with unmanly aggression', and violence is seen as an important part of the making of 'gentlemanliness', which is a point highlighted and criticised in both *The Tenant* and *Agnes Grey* (115). Through his invitation to his friends for the shooting season, Arthur 'ends up reconfiguring Grassdale Manor into a countryside gentleman's club with his dissolute fraternity' (117). Such corruption of the domestic space goes to the extent that even little Arthur becomes included in his father's male company, and is taught his father's 'evil habits' including drinking and cursing, which, in his father's words, is to 'make a man of him' (*TWH* 350). Resolute to save her son from this dissolute 'manliness', Helen plans to earn money from her paintings and escape from Grassdale, and she uses the library as her studio, because 'none of our gentlemen had the smallest pretensions to a literary taste' (353).

On the other hand, since upper-class victims of such violent, cruel gentlemanliness are characterised by intense reserve, they are unable to speak (whether openly or subtly) or form alliances (whether between women or across gender), and hence abuse remains unchallenged.

As Joshi argues, *The Tenant* 'censures the silences that enshrine and perpetuate [the bad behaviour of upper-class men]' (911). While Helen did not believe in the words about Arthur's affair with Annabella until she witnesses it, the only two people who care to offer her a warning are Rachel and Hargrave, the former a servant, and the latter out of his own selfish intent. Furthermore, after Helen made this discovery, she chooses not to share this crucial piece of information with Annabella's husband, Lord Lowborough. When Lowborough learns of Annabella's infidelity two years later, it is reasonable that he accuses Helen: 'you have injured me too, by this ungenerous concealment!' (*TWH* 342). Helen's refusal to gossip has led Lowborough to unknowingly bring up a daughter of Annabella and Arthur. Although Helen is right in pointing out that as another victim of this affair, Lowborough would be far happier than she is, for he is a man and can obtain a divorce if he wishes, it is still undeniable that Lowborough shares the similar position with Helen and even Milicent as victims of isolating silence, trapped in a bad upper-class marriage.

On the surface, Gilbert and Arthur appear to share several traits in their 'masculinity'. For instance, early in the novel, the author depicts Gilbert's unnecessary violence in his hunting: when he cannot find any prey, he vents his annoyance on birds, turning his gun 'against the hawks and carrion crows, whose depredations, as [he] suspected, had deprived [him] of better prey' (*TWH* 22). Moreover, his attack on Lawrence at the beginning of chapter 14 is the only instance of directly narrated physical violence in the novel. For most of the story, Gilbert is emotionally crippled, impetuous, and dismisses idle talk. As a member of the middle-class Linden-Car, his similarity with Arthur in these aspects appears to challenge the view that the harmful 'gentlemanliness' is confined to upper-class men, and that the rejection of gossip and isolating silence among the aristocrat community have contributed to its formation.

Nevertheless, although Gilbert disregards gossip, he at least believes in the power of written language. His acquaintance with Helen develops primarily through the exchange of books (texts): 'So we talked about painting, poetry, and music, theology, geology, and philosophy: once or twice I lent her a book, and once she lent me one in return' (*TWH* 73). While his bias towards oral language and thus inability to communicate feelings does affect his character, the impact remains limited by his belief in the written language, especially when contrasted with Arthur's 'club', none of which care to step into the library. In addition, unlike Grassdale Manor, Linden-Car offers no space that promotes a model of masculine bonding based on violence or debauchery. The flaws associated with masculinity in Gilbert appear more personal than collective, partly shaped by his mother's skewed view of masculinity, and even Gilbert himself admits that he is 'a little bit spoiled' by his mother and sister (*TWH* 36). Even so, Gilbert would participate in a debate between Helen and his fellow villagers on children's education in the parlour of his house – the community of Linden-Car is connected by such indoor talks rather than shooting, gambling, or drinking. As Joshi notes, despite his many faults, Gilbert is at least 'accustomed to and comfortable in the company of women and […] is almost always ensconced in the ladies' sitting room, a room Huntingdon will not enter' (917). Although Gilbert almost always disregards the gossip floating about the parlours of Linden-Car, he is from the beginning familiar with, and accepting of, this space of oral language. The shared flaw observed in Gilbert and Halford is emotional reticence, which differs in kind, rather than in degree, from the moral corruption of Arthur's upper-class gentlemen's club. Most importantly, both men eventually learn to express themselves and exchange gossip, because the community they belong to, unlike that of the upper classes, offers more fertile ground for its circulation.

Eventually, it is precisely because both Helen and Gilbert have learnt the value of communication – of 'gossip' – that enables their union. As Gilbert overhears Helen's conversation with Lawrence, he mistakenly believes that the two are having an affair, and angrily cuts all interaction with Helen. Helen eventually confronts him and asks about his sudden change in attitude, and, having heard about Gilbert's 'proof', she realises the misunderstanding between them, and claims: 'You should have come to me after all […] and heard what I had to say in my own justification […] You should have told me all – no matter *how* bitterly. It would have been better than this silence' (*TWH* 127). Having experienced all the misery in her marriage, much of which resulted by silence between her and her would-be allies and friends, Helen has come to realise the importance of communication. Although at the end of this conversation she offers Gilbert her diary, that is, a text rather than an oral version of her story, her action confirms that she is making an effort in interpersonal expression and exchange. Much later, when Helen has left Linden-Car to look after her dying husband, Gilbert asks through Lawrence's letter if he could 'enlighten [his] mother and sister on [Helen's] real history and circumstance', in order to clear the false rumour around her, and 'make the neighbourhood sensible of the shameful injustice they have done her' (*TWH* 431).

That Gilbert sees this as the best way to clear misunderstanding suggests his recognition of the potent power of gossip: both the original rumour and its eventual clarification travel through the same channel. Additionally, in actually doing so, Gilbert in effect participates in and directs the chain of gossip as its first link.

Soon after Gilbert's clarification of Helen's name in the village, Lawrence leaves Linden-Car for Arthur's funeral, and Helen's letters via his mediation comes to a stop. Believing that Helen's silence in previous letters signifies her rejection of his love, Gilbert refrains from writing to her. At this moment, it is a rumour – reported by Eliza Millward – that Helen is about to marry Walter Hargrave, which spurs Gilbert into action, hurrying all the way to Grassdale (and later to Staningley Hall). This false rumour ultimately leads to the resolution of their romantic plot. Far from undermining gossip's role, this incident reinforces its power in a slightly ironic way. By the end of the novel, both Helen and Gilbert have, in their own ways, acknowledged the potency of gossip, and become its beneficiaries. When, twenty years later, Gilbert recounts both Helen's and his own story to Halford, he is offering gossip from multiple people on multiple levels, and more importantly, he is offering it as a reciprocal exchange for Halford's previous gossip. This mutual storytelling constitutes a constructive action of bond-building, one that reaffirms emotional connection through dialogic reciprocity.

3. Conclusion

In contrast to the structurally simple and straightforward *Agnes Grey*, Brontë explores the possibilities of narrative form with far greater freedom in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Within the narrative, both Helen and Gilbert gradually learn to engage with various forms of language – letters, diaries, conversation, and gossip. In doing so, they uncover the potent power embedded in both written and oral modes of communication. These forms become tools through which they attempt to break the silences imposed upon them by social conditioning, namely, silences shaped by the demands of gendered and class-bound decorum.

Reflecting on scholarly treatments of sound in literary and linguistic study, John M. Picker notes that traditional criticism has often insisted on a binary choice: either privileging orality over the written text, or vice versa (13). He argues that such opinions tend to overlook a third position, which maintains that, in T. V. F. Brogan's definition: 'the aural and written modes of language are equivalent but simply differ, both deriving from the ontologically prior nature of language itself' (1172). Brontë had clearly aligned herself with this third perspective in *The Tenant*. In the novel, neither spoken nor written language is depicted as the primal form; instead, each carries distinct affordances and limitations in the struggle to deal with silence. Her aim, it seems, is to exhaust all available means to create interpersonal connection in face of silence within the narrative, and, outside the narrative, to communicate the moral message she identifies in the Preface to 'the young of both sexes' through the circulation of this novel that incorporates both forms of language. Although the novel itself is, of course, textual, the term Brontë repeatedly uses in the Preface is 'whisper': she would 'whisper' truths in the public ear as against the 'whisper' of 'peace, peace', which is the concealment of blatant facts (*TWH* 4). Her word choice, which is closely associated with the act of gossip, once again affirms her equal regard for both solutions to the problem of silence.

Chapter Three: *Jane Eyre*: Silence and Power in the Autobiography

In her introduction to *Jane Eyre*, the novelist Stevie Davies comments on the 'authentic reality' of the novel aroused by the author's description of the world, which she deems truthful to sensory perception. In particular, Davies notes that the novel 'establishes a continuum of sound, conversation, chitchat, repartee, love-talk, birdsong, a stormily rustling dress, the clang of hooves on icy stone' (xxvii). Yet, she ignores the fact that this 'continuum of sound' is punctuated by, and sometimes even opposed by the backdrop of, an omnipresent silence, and that such silence congregates around the protagonist, Jane Eyre.

Silence is imposed upon Lowood and its students for the majority of the time, where talking loud is a 'privilege' (*JE* 55); a timespan of eight years of Jane's life after the epidemic in Lowood is past 'almost in silence' (99). Since Jane's arrival as a governess, Thornfield in the first three months is 'silent as a church' (139), and even though she occasionally hears the demoniac laugh of the imprisoned Bertha Mason on the third story of the house, Jane often resorts to the 'silence and solitude' of the location to pacify her innate restlessness (129). Witty and eloquent as she can be, Jane's dialogues with Rochester are often interrupted by her silence, from when they first get acquainted with each other to the time when their intended marriage is revealed as illegitimate (156-7, 252, 344-5, 363). When Bertha bites her brother, the incident begins in a chaos of screams and snarls, but ends in 'but three sounds at three long intervals' all the night, as well as a ban on any conversation between Jane and Mason (238-43). As Jane leaves Thornfield and wanders to Moor House, the first scene she witnesses from outside the window is 'as silent as if all the figures had been shadows and the firelit apartment a picture' (382). There she encounters Diana, Mary, and especially St John Rivers, a man as quiet as herself. Even the climactic event of the mysterious call-and-response between Jane and Rochester (who are miles away from each other) concludes in a sort of silence: at their reunion, when Rochester tells Jane how he has heard her faraway response to his desperate call, Jane chooses not to disclose her side of the story, leaving it a secret for her lover.

Unlike that in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the recurrent silence in *Jane Eyre* is not to be understood as an isolated, clear-cut element that conveys a unitary dimension of meanings, but is instead ambiguous. As discussed in the previous chapter, *The Tenant* represents silence primarily as a breakdown in interpersonal communication and as an inability to articulate emotion. While the causes of silence differ according to gender and class, the novel ultimately presents silence as a symptom of a broader social condition or impasse. Although the narrative depicts this predicament in detail (especially through Helen's relationship with her female companions, and through Gilbert's emotional reticence), its primary focus lies in solutions to this silence. By contrast, in *Jane Eyre*, silence itself is one of the central concerns. It appears in multiple forms and is situated within a variety of relational and contextual frameworks. Throughout the narrative, silence shifts between the 'foreground' and the 'background'. Sometimes it is a component that constructs the tension between silence and speech, sometimes it is the prelude to and/or the aftermath of an outburst of sounds/voices. The intricate relationship between the recurring silence and the vocal, autobiographical narrative that harbours and communicates it contributes to an additional layer of significance. Active or passive, powerful or powerless, momentary or persisting, silence in *Jane Eyre* seems to serve as an all-encompassing theme. As David Toop notes in his study of writing audible space, silence, ‘like noise, is a hopelessly problematic term, so overcome with meaning and misunderstanding as to be meaningless’ (51). However – and therefore – through an analysis of such a complexity of meanings, surrounding the keyword of ‘silence’, we may achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the novel. With its representation in the novel as the axis, this chapter focuses especially on the silence in the relationship between Jane Eyre and four important characters – Helen Burns, Bertha Mason, St John Rivers, and Edward Rochester – and examines how the heroine gradually acquires power and interiority in silence, and through silence.

1. Helen Burns and Silence as Self-Assertion

Silence in *Jane Eyre* debuts as an unwanted condition imposed on the recipient, a state of disempowered ‘loss of voice’ as opposed to the power to speak freely, and is often other-initiated. However, as the narrative progresses, it gradually takes on more positive connotations, at times becoming a self-initiated marker of strength and agency in conversations and, more generally, in relationships. In contrast to the relatively unambiguous and singular portrayal of silence in *The Tenant*, silence in *Jane Eyre* is more fluid in form. Its meanings, as well as the power relations it reflects and negotiates, proves far more dynamic. Compared to that in *The Tenant*, silence in *Jane Eyre* conforms more to Cheryl Glenn’s definition of this state as a ‘rhetorical absence [of text or voice] with a function’ (4). This section, then, examines silence's function as a way of self-assertion and Jane's acquisition of it in her youth.

The novel opens with a scene of domesticity in which the Reed family are gathered around the fireside, while Jane is explicitly excluded. Mrs Reed claims that the maid Bessie has reported certain unbecoming behaviours on Jane's part; as a result, she is to remain apart until she learns to be a more sociable child. When Jane asks Mrs Reed 'What does Bessie say I have done', the latter answers that she does not like 'questioners' and demands quietness, telling her that, 'until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent' (*JE* 10). Such enforced silence recurs in Jane's life in Lowood, where 'Silence!' is a frequent order, and later at Thornfield, where her capacity for keeping silence earns her Rochester's trust in the event of Bertha's attack on Mason. 'Speaking,' concludes Janet Freeman, 'is the equivalent of self-assertion, for Jane Eyre, the assertion of her most intimate, essential self' (691). Therefore, the persisting silence imposed on Jane must be a deprivation of her power of self-assertion. Yet paradoxically, for Jane, silence is often also a way of self-assertion. In the face of Rochester, who is superior in social status and who demands that she speak, she uses her silence as a rejection of and defence against his powerful speech:

> '[…] It would please me now to draw you out – to learn more of you – therefore speak.'
>
> Instead of speaking, I smiled; and not a very complacent or submissive smile either.
>
> '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. (156)

However, such a weaponised usage of silence is not innately managed but learnt, and Jane learns it at Lowood, a place requiring silence,[30] from her first friend Helen Burns, a girl of silence. Helen Burns introduces herself to Jane Eyre and to the reader with a ‘cough’ – a sound, rather than a word (*JE* 59). Surely, it is an indication of Helen’s tuberculosis, yet it also hints at the possibility of communication by ways other than intelligible language – by silence and noises, as shall be shown later in the novel. Jane soon realises that this girl reading *Rasselas* on the veranda is a person of astounding silence and reticence. When Jane, having taken a look at the book, finds it dull and hands it back to Helen, Helen receives her favoured book ‘quietly, and, without saying anything’ (*JE* 59). Soon, Jane witnesses how Helen is forced to stand in the middle of the classroom as a public punishment, and realises that Helen bears it ‘so quietly’; moreover, Helen endures the teacher’s unjust accusation, insults, and flogging in such a ‘silence’ that Jane cannot but wonder at (61, 64-5). Stirred by such quietness, Jane tries to ‘get her to talk’ (66). From this moment on, Jane finds her first friend in life, who not only listens to her, but also calms her with a contagious, soothing silence when Jane is accused by Mr Brocklehurst of being a liar and despairs alone. Bringing food to Jane, who is ‘weep[ing] aloud’, Helen remains ‘silent as an Indian’. Jane is the first to speak, and after an enlightening dialogue with Helen, she is comforted: ‘and we reposed in silence’ (82-3).

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[30] Helen Groth in the chapter ‘Listening Reader’ (Lewis 107-24) notes how Brontë lays great emphasis on the depiction of all types of sounds at Lowood, in order to ‘both signal [Jane’s] acute sense of her own difference from her environs and invite the reader to listen for further cues and signs of internal disquiet inspired by the unfamiliar hubbub of the school’ (117). Furthermore, Groth’s close reading reveals how this ‘unfamiliar hubbub’ is constantly interrupted by staff and teachers’ demand for silence.

Superficially, Helen’s silence seems to be a typical symbol of her passivity – her inferior position as a girl student in face of the teachers, and as a daughter unfavoured by her father who remarries shortly before her premature death. In a culture advocating that ‘children should be seen and not heard’, and in a school where ‘Silence!’ is a frequent order (54, 56), Helen abides by such order, which seems to reflect how she is determined to accept and forebear an unjust, silenced life. When Jane claims she herself would not bear such treatment, Helen gives a crucial comment: ‘Yet it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it: it is weak and silly to say you *cannot bear* what it is your fate to be required to bear’ (66, original italics). It is from this sentence, from Helen’s forbearance that Gilbert and Gubar summarise her character as an ‘impossible ideal to Jane: the ideal – defined by Goethe’s Makarie – of self-renunciation, of all-consuming (and consumptive) spirituality’ (345-6).

Yet the key phrase in Helen’s sentence here is really ‘if you could not avoid it’, which implies that Helen wants to avoid it. Helen Burns never really accepts her life obediently, but instead faces it with a quiet defiance. Her mind always slips away when she ‘should be listening to Miss Scatcherd’, but she is very attentive and eloquent towards Miss Temple; in other words, her so-called inattentiveness is a result of Miss Scatcherd’s lack of capability as a teacher. When Helen does listen to the latter, and answers the questions perfectly, she is scolded for her untidy appearance (66). What Helen wants to avoid but cannot is the personal bias from a teacher in a boarding school – a figure much more powerful than her. Since she will suffer from such prejudice no matter what she does and whether she defends herself or not, the way she stays silently inattentive and unruly indicates a minimalist act of rebellion.

In her systematic study on silence, Cheryl Glenn first reviews the definitions of silence proposed by several scholars from various disciplinary perspectives, highlighting their divergent classifications of its possible meanings. Among them, Richard L. Johannesen does not merely divide silence into broadly ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ categories; instead, he offers a particularly nuanced taxonomy, summarising the potential meanings of silence into a lengthy list, which throws light on the analysis of Helen’s character. According to his classification, silence may signify that the person is thinking, hesitating, expressing agreement or disagreement, experiencing boredom, anger, empathy, etc.[31] Among his list, two of the potential meanings are especially pertinent to Helen’s case: that the person is ‘daydreaming or preoccupied with other matters’, and that the person ‘uses silence to enhance his own isolation, independence, and sense of self-uniqueness’. (qtd. in Glenn 16).

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[31] For the full list, see Glenn 16.

When Jane first meets Helen at the veranda and asks her about the school and the people, Helen ends the conversation by requesting silence: 'I have given you answers enough for the present. Now I want to read' (*JE* 61). Later, when Jane wonders at Helen's quiet forbearance in face of the public punishment, she also notices how Helen's mind is self-contained, how 'her sight seems turned in, gone down into her heart' (62). It is without doubt that Helen's frequent silence, which is closely tied to her ascetic endurance and which is noted by Jane, clearly reflects the influence of her religious convictions.[32] However, the two examples noted above also point to the secular, social dimension of silence: her silence, at times, manifests a form of inwardly grounded refusal of the external world; it is her means to an independent, undisturbed inner world and self-assertion.

Since her silence is mostly a way of self-assertion and subtle rebellion – a reaction to what she cannot avoid – Helen is rarely silent in the company of those she likes and trusts, and when she does fall into silence with Jane, it is not of a defiant, non-cooperative stance, but of a more positve sort, and is willingly broken. The relationship between Jane and Helen is outlined through four conversations in the Lowood episode. Their first conversation takes place in the veranda scene: here they meet as strangers, and Jane is the one to ask too many questions and Helen the one to request silence. Their third and fourth dialogues happen after they have become friends, and in both cases Helen uses her silence to comfort Jane, first in response to Jane's being called a liar, and then in the prelude to Helen's own impending death. In fact, the two scenes correspond to each other:

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[32] For the Christian tradition of the search for silence and a belief in the connection between silence and revelation, see Corbin 41-54.

> Resting my head on Helen's shoulder, I put my arms round her waist; she drew me to her, and we reposed in silence. (82-3)

> She kissed me, and I her, and we both soon slumbered.
>
> […] Miss Temple […] had found me laid in a little crib; my face against Helen Burns's shoulder, my arms round her neck. I was asleep, and Helen was – dead. (98)

By paralleling silent death – the eternal repose – to silent sleep, Jane is able to be soothed by her loss.

The second conversation between Jane and Helen, however, occurs at a curious in-between moment, when the pair are progressing from being strangers to becoming friends, and thus silence occurs for different reasons and reflects the shifting dynamics of their relationship. Impressed by Helen's previous quietness, Jane tries to get her to talk, and when Helen does talk – commenting that one must bear what she cannot avoid – Jane is awed by Helen's ideas. Jane then points out that Miss Scatcherd is cruel to Helen, but the latter expresses disagreement by keeping silence, the same gesture she employed in face of Miss Scatcherd's unjust treatment. At this moment, Jane is but a distant schoolmate to Helen. Yet shortly after, when Jane disagrees with Helen's belief that one should love her enemies, she recounts her troubled childhood at Gateshead to the latter:

> Bitter and truculent when excited, I spoke as I felt, without reserve or softening.

> Helen heard me patiently to the end; I expected she would then make a remark, but she said nothing.
>
> ‘Well,’ I asked impatiently, ‘is not Mrs Reed a hard-hearted, bad woman?’ (69)

At first glance, Helen’s silence in this instance resembles the previous occasion, conveying roundabout disagreement. Nevertheless, as Jane presses for a comment, Helen promptly responds with a lengthy passage, voicing her opinion clearly and comprehensively:

> She has been unkind to you, no doubt; because you see, she dislikes your cast of character, as Miss Scatcherd does mine; but how minutely you remember all she has done and said to you! […] Would you not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs […]. (69)

Helen believes that, although Mrs Reed is indeed unkind, Jane should forget and be tolerant. Following this, she expresses piously her belief in the eternal, purified soul, a belief that leads her to become tolerant towards unkindness. Throughout the Lowood episode, this is one of the very few, if not the only, instances in which Helen delivers such a sustained and impassioned speech. In over 320 words, she not only reveals the depth and reflectiveness of her intellect and her remarkable eloquence, but more importantly, she communicates her attitude towards Jane: a willingness to share her inner world openly and without reservation, rather than conveying her views merely through ambiguous silence. Moreover, this articulate speech is followed by another moment of silence, which Jane recognises as an unspoken request for meditative introspection – not because Jane has asked too much, as in the veranda scene, but because Helen has fully expressed her thoughts on the matter. Unlike Helen's attitude towards Miss Scatcherd or an as-yet-unknown Jane, this process of silence-eloquence-silence reflects two aspects of the evolving relationship: first, Helen has admitted Jane as a friend – a person intimate enough to become her confidante. Secondly, while Jane is the one who initiates the conversation and who makes Helen listen to her life-story, Helen – passive participant and listener as she seems – is the one who takes the dominant position. For, while Helen can cut off the dialogue with silence at her discretion, Jane's recounting necessitates a listener.

In his exploration of confessional discourse, Foucault states that 'the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he [sic] who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing' (62). That is, the power lies in the silent listener, rather than the story-teller. Therefore, in their interactions, Helen is often the 'patient' one, whereas Jane the 'impatient' one. In her article on Jane's struggle for self-narration, Carla Kaplan notes that although Jane vows to tell her tale to 'anybody who asks me' (*JE* 44), hardly anybody asks, and 'when they do ask, the request is not often based in the sort of intimacy Jane desires, but in a judgemental, juridical, even tyrannical position' (10). In this second conversation, when Helen asks Jane to explain why the latter cannot love Mrs Reed, whom Jane views as her enemy, she is asking almost as a friend. Although Helen's lengthy response to Jane's recounting still reveals her juridical stance, her request for the tale and her patient listening makes her the best listener Jane can have at this stage of her life.

Unfortunately, even this silent, juridical listener is not always promised for Jane, for shortly after, not only is Jane's voice contaminated by Helen's narration, her role as the supposed speaker is replaced by Helen, and the former is reduced to the listener. During his inspection of the school, Mr Brocklehurst notices Jane and accuses her of being a liar in front of the whole school. Jane is desperate when Helen comes to comfort her, and the two 'reposed in silence'. At this moment, Miss Temple summons Jane to have a talk with her on the matter, and although she intends to invite Jane alone, she states that, as Helen is with Jane, 'she may come too' (*JE* 83). As Miss Temple asks Jane to give her side of the story regarding her childhood experience in Gateshead, Jane's account is a modified version of the original one that she has told Helen:

> Exhausted by emotion, my language was more subdued than it generally was when it developed that sad theme; and *mindful of Helen's warnings against the* indulgence *of resentment*, I infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. (84, my italics)

Although such modification makes her account 'more credible', it is no longer entirely Jane's own voice – the story-teller has been influenced by her listener. Rosemarie Bodenheimer identifies this episode as 'the socialisation of Jane's narrative style; the moment when she realises the power of conscious control over sequence, diction, and tone' (391). Yet Jane in this process has also relinquished part of her power over personal speech, and the apparently silent Helen finds her way discreetly into the speaker's voice. Bodenheimer notes the difference between the '"credible story" Miss Temple hears and the personal sources or original truths of the experiences themselves' (391-2), and this difference marks the way in which Jane is subtly silenced and how her voice is refashioned, even replaced. The remainder of her night in Miss Temple's office is an analogous representation of this replacement: while Jane is originally Miss Temple's only intended interlocutor, after she tells her modified story, Miss Temple's attention is shifted to Helen, who is but the incidental participant of Jane and Miss Temple's conversation. '[And] now a conversation followed between her and Helen,' Jane recounts, 'which it was indeed a privilege to be admitted to hear' (86). As Kaplan notes, Jane 'sets out to *find* an ideal listener, but she seems forced to settle, instead, for *being* one' (15).

In the relationship between Jane and Helen, it seems that the latter's silence is self-chosen and thus self-assertive, whereas the former is subtly and unconsciously silenced. However, when Helen passes away in Jane's arms, the parallel between her slumber-like demise and Jane's slumber not only comforts the latter's loss, it also creates a symbolic bond in silence, through which Jane inherits some of Helen's legacy. While in Gateshead Jane asserts herself through an occasional burst of voice, when she leaves from Lowood for Thornfield years later, she has adopted the habit of self-assertive silence in the face of 'what she cannot avoid' (for example Rochester), as a way of resistance.

2. Bertha Mason, Strident Noises, and Silent Language

In their influential criticism of the novel, Gilbert and Gubar famously contend that, in this story of confinement and escape, the central confrontation is not that between Jane and

Rochester (the heroine vs. the hero), but that between Jane and Rochester's mad wife, Bertha Mason. Rather than 'an encounter […] with her own sexuality,' this confrontation happens between Jane and her 'imprisoned "hunger, rebellion, and rage", a secret dialogue of self and soul' (339). Within this confrontation, Bertha serves as the 'most threatening avatar of Jane', and is simultaneously Jane's proxy, imitation, and a lesson for her.[33] Following this theoretical framework, this section focuses on and approaches the intricate relationship between Jane and Bertha, which is both antagonistic and intimately bonded, from the aspect of noise, language, and silence.

During her stay at Thornfield, Jane Eyre is frequently silent, and for a variety of reasons. Having learnt from Helen, she uses silence as a resistant self-assertion in front of Rochester, but she is also silent because she is reticent in character: for Rochester, her 'gravity, considerateness, and caution [are] made to be the recipient of secrets' (*JE* 168). Later, when Bertha's attack on her brother Richard Mason wakes everyone at Thornfield, it is because of Jane's reticence that Rochester asks her to give a hand, for he needs someone who will have no conversation with Mason, however curious she is. Additionally, Jane's silence results from her position as a governess, or, in Kathryn Hughes's words, a position as 'neither family member nor servant' (86).[34] Both a newcomer and a person of intermediary station, Jane's conversation partner in the house is mostly confined to her pupil Adèle, and occasionally the housekeeper Mrs Fairfax and Rochester. On one night during Miss Ingram's sojourn at Thornfield, Rochester insists that Jane accompany Adèle to the drawing-room for the child to be introduced to the ladies. Jane follows Mrs Fairfax's advice and arrives early to 'avoid the embarrassment of making a formal entrance', yet she cannot avoid the embarrassment of being unkindly discussed: the guests tease her as a governess and mock governesses in general, and the conversation is made intendedly in her presence but excludes her participation: they talk *about* her, but not *to* her (205-7). As a governess, Jane is silent because she is rarely talked to and listened to.

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[33] See chapter 10 of Gilbert and Gubar, especially 339-63.

[34] See Hughes, 85-6. Interestingly, Hughes here gives the example of an awkward moment recorded by Charlotte Brontë herself in a letter, and observes how upper-middle class families in Brontë's time were unable to provide proper social and physical space for the governess with such intermediary station, whereas aristocratic households were able to do so. Thus, in the scene to be discussed, the awkwardness Jane Eyre experiences in the aristocratic Thornfield is more of an artistic embellishment of Brontë's personal experiences in a upper-middle class family, rather than a historical fact.

However, where Jane is silent, Bertha makes noises. The connection between Jane's silence and Bertha's noises begins at the third floor of the house, and here it is necessary to refer again to one of the scenes listed at the beginning of this chapter:

> [The] restlessness was in my nature […] Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, *safe in the silence and solitude of the spot* […]; and, best of all, to *open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended – a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously*.
>
> […]
>
> When thus alone, I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole's laugh […]: I heard, too, her eccentric *murmurs*; stranger than her laugh. There were days when she was quite *silent*; but there were others when *I could not account for the sounds she made*. (*JE* 129-30, my italics)

Gilbert and Gubar state that the third floor – the attic – becomes a ‘complex focal point where Jane’s own rationality (what she has learnt from Miss Temple) and her irrationality (her “hunger, rebellion and rage”) intersect’ (348). Here, her rationality is displayed as her clear and articulate meditation on female desire for liberty, in the passage beginning with ‘It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity’ (*JE* 129). Her irrationality, on the other hand, is both demonstrated in the ‘restlessness’ in her nature underlying this rationality, and externalised as Bertha’s uncanny murmurs and laughs which fill up the space, and which Jane mistakenly attributes to Grace Poole. That is to say, the intersection of rationality and irrationality is achieved through the concurrence of sound/silence and voice/noise. Jane needs the silence of the enclosure to comfort her, yet within such silence hide unexpected laughs and murmurs; the silence allows her inner voice to emerge and to be heard, but what is also heard are the unintelligible noises of another woman. While Bertha’s murmurs are inexplicable to Jane – a madwoman’s involuntary outbursts that are only meaningful to herself – Jane’s ‘never-ending tale’ she creates and narrates in her mind during her meditations on the third floor is also known to nobody else but herself. In fact, the passage omitted here is Jane’s famous speech on how women feel just as men feel, which several critics have called a ‘feminist manifesto’.[35] At a time when middle- and upper-class women were confined to the domestic sphere and high moral standards, such a manifesto, ahead of its time and uttered here by an orphan-governess, was probably ‘eccentric’ and ‘unaccountable’ to her contemporaries on an ideological level, just as Bertha's murmurs and noises are eccentric and unaccountable to Jane on a linguistic level. In Adrienne Rich's words, Jane's idea of gender equality was 'next-door to insanity in England in the 1840s' (469). In such a way, the auditory connection between Jane and Bertha is built up at the third floor.

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[35] See Kaplan 13 and Rich 468.

In their examination of the scene where Bertha Mason sneaks into Jane's chamber two nights before Jane's wedding, Gilbert and Gubar point out that Bertha is acting figuratively as an avatar and the 'truest and darkest double' of Jane. As Jane is anxious about and secretly dreads the impending wedding day and her future as 'Jane Rochester', an identity represented by the 'strange, wraith-like apparel' brought for her by Rochester, Bertha '*does* […] what Jane wants to do', and tears up the wedding veil (359-60). In fact, Bertha begins to act as Jane's avatar shortly after the auditory connection between the two is built up, much earlier than this incident.

After their first encounter, Jane and Rochester take some time to acquaint themselves with each other, a process bracketed by Rochester's recounting of his affair with Céline Varens. Jane is gratified at his confidence, which she sees as 'a tribute to [her] discretion', and she comes to like him. Curious about Rochester's gloomy claim that he cannot be happy at Thornfield, Jane asks herself three questions that night: 'Why not? What alienates him from the house? Will he leave it again soon?' Almost immediately, Bertha answers the three questions for Jane through her actions: Jane is woken up first by a 'vague murmur, peculiar and lugubrious' just above her, then by a 'demoniac laugh' at the 'very keyhole of [her] chamber-door' (*JE* 172-3). Alarmed by the sounds, she unlocks the door and saves Rochester from his burning bed. The next day, Jane is told that Rochester has left Thornfield for the Leas, which is an abrupt departure after eight weeks of stay. While it is not stated explicitly in the novel, it is possible that Rochester's sudden decision has partly resulted from Bertha's attack. Unbeknownst to her, Jane has seen the vague outline of the answers she is searching for: Rochester cannot be happy at Thornfield because his mad, incendiary wife is locked up there. In this incident, Bertha's presence is solely auditory; more importantly, her sounds – 'hushed' and 'suppressed' – are perceived by Jane alone, pointing to the auditory bond between them. Bertha's madness deprives her use of language, yet her noises are illuminating for Jane enough.

The word 'illuminating' is even more pertinent on the next occasion Bertha appears, both literally and metaphorically, for on the night Jane hears the horrible noise of Bertha's attack on Mason, she is first awakened by a splendid moonrise:

> [The moon's] glorious gaze roused me. Awaking in the dead of night, I opened my eyes on her disc […] I half rose, and stretched my arm to draw the curtain. Good God! What a cry!
>
> The night – its silence – its rest, was rent in twain by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound […].
>
> My pulse stopped: my heart stood still; my stretched arm was paralysed. (*JE* 238)

According to Gilbert and Gubar, the juxtaposition of these two events add ambiguities to the image of the guiding, maternal moon.[36] However, the moon image in this scene conveys more than violent lunacy, for Bertha's scream is also illuminating. Earlier this night, the unexpected guest Richard Mason visits Thornfield, and Jane wonders about his identity, his self-claimed friendship with Rochester, and Rochester's stricken attitude towards the seemingly docile guest. Again, the secrets are revealed (albeit not completely) to Jane by Bertha's attack and its aftermath. Jane is asked for help, again for her discretion, and although she is not allowed to converse with Mason, she hears enough to draw her conclusions from: Bertha's bestial sounds, fragments of conversation between Mason and Rochester, and the interaction between the two men. More importantly, after Rochester sends Mason away, he cannot help but confide to Jane in vague words about the 'capital error' he had made years ago in a foreign land. Almost all the clues are now in Jane's possession, and she is missing only one last piece, which very soon manifests itself in the form of a silent Bertha sneaking into Jane's room and tearing her wedding veil apart. Bertha is silent this time because her madness stops her from pronouncing the answer – her true identity – more directly by herself. Just as Jane needs Bertha as her proxy, Bertha needs a proxy to speak for her as well, to announce her identity as Rochester's wife, rather than a nameless, invisible madwoman in the attic; this announcement takes place not at her own wedding, but at Jane's wedding, when the solicitor Mr Briggs abruptly shows up in the church and utters the words 'not loudly', but 'distinctly, calmly, steadily': 'Mr Rochester has a wife now living' (*JE* 334).

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[36] See 342 and 363. Gilbert and Gubar traces the maternal moon imagery back to the red-room scene, which will be discussed later in this section.

Crucially, on the night when Bertha attacks Mason, Jane again hears sounds and words that are heard only by her. From a realistic reading, it is because Bertha's attic is just above her room, yet this spatial arrangement itself is also of metaphorical significance. Connected by exclusive transmission of sounds, Jane's bedroom – the 'safe haven', the 'solitary room' with 'no fears' – and Bertha's prison-attic are mirror-images of each other. Carol-Ann Farkas notices that unlike the red chamber, Jane's bedrooms in her later life are more protective than confining. At Thornfield, Jane's chamber harbours 'dreams, presentiments and sympathies', and 'while it may not offer her much protection from Bertha's nocturnal wanderings, it does provide some refuge, as a retreat from Rochester's presence when she discovers the truth about her fiancé's past' (52).

Yet, as Bertha is to a large extent Jane's alter ego, and as their separate rooms are two spaces interconnected literally and metaphorically by sounds, Bertha is the other inhabitant of Jane's chamber from the very beginning (just as Jane is also the other inhabitant of the third story corridor – a spatial extension of the attic). Hence, the chamber cannot protect Jane from Bertha's night wandering, as Bertha can step into Jane's bedroom at will. Here, a more intuitive reading would position the two women as adversaries: given the stereotypical thriller plot in the Gothic novel, the reader is likely to assume that Bertha, motivated by sexual jealousy, would harm Jane upon entering her room. This reading, however, is destabilised when the underlying spatial and symbolic parallels between the two women is taken into consideration. In fact, Jane's chamber *need not* protect her from Bertha, because, as the two inhabitants share an interconnected space, by extension, they share a similar fate in the Gothic, patriarchal mansion of Thornfield; therefore, they cannot and will not harm each other. On the night Bertha burns Rochester's bed, she peeps through Jane's bedroom keyhole but does not sneak in, after which Jane hastens to bolt the door. When Jane ventures to open the door, she finds the candle put on the matting, as if answering her unuttered need moments before: 'I wish I had kept my candle burning' (173). Bertha burns Rochester's bed, but leaves the candle to light Jane's way. Interestingly, when Bertha *does* sneak into Jane's bedroom on a later night, she (without harming Jane) destroys Jane's veil, and on leaving, she 'thrust[s] up her candle close to [Jane's] face' and 'extinguish[es] it under [Jane's] eyes' (327). Silently, the two women exchange their first and only face-to-face glance in half darkness, with no danger of arson: the candlelight is used only to illuminate their faces to each other, before it is immediately extinguished.

As their chamber/attics are interconnected, and as Jane's silence/inward voice finds its expression and correspondence in her proxy Bertha's noises, this connection feeds Bertha's power to Jane. As a governess at Thornfield, Jane's silence (resulting from isolation and ignorance), when combined with the enclosure of her bedroom, and its figurative connection to Bertha's attic, endows new power in her: the power of the written language. Moreover, this time, the power is not wielded through her proxy Bertha. The first time Jane vaguely realises her isolated, marginalised position at Thornfield happens shortly before the arrival of Blanche Ingram's party, and such realisation is reflected by her observation of Grace Poole, whom Jane believes to be the 'madwoman' and to whom Jane attributes those eccentric murmurs and laughs: 'not a soul in the house, except me, noticed her habits, or seemed to marvel at them: no one discussed her position or employment; no one pitied her solitude or isolation' (*JE* 192). That only Jane notes the presence of her alter ego's proxy is a reflection of her own situation at Thornfield: following this observation, Jane recounts how two maidservants drop a conversation on seeing her, and how she finds herself alone excluded from a secret about Grace Poole. The secret is that Poole looks after Rochester's mad wife Bertha. While Jane shares similar isolation with her proxy, it is precisely the existence of said proxy, which is a secret to the newcomer governess, that is partly responsible for Jane's own isolation at Thornfield.

However, trapped in the same predicament for the moment, Jane ultimately finds a way out of isolation and silence that is completely different from Bertha's, which points to the defining difference between them: Jane's literacy as a governess and Bertha's linguistic inability due to madness. Quoting Susan Fraiman's remark that Jane's uncomfortable in-between position of being neither family nor servant starts at Gateshead, Nora Gilbert concludes that Jane is 'treated like a governess from the moment we meet her'.[37] This way of living forces a governess to become an 'observer narrator' who stays at the periphery of the family, and although this may not be gratifying for the governess herself, for her employer, she now holds dangerous observational power. The possibility – and often the fact – that a governess will write to her family and discuss or even complain about her pupils means that, her employer's household risks being 'monitored by a patently *literate* outsider' (Gilbert 463-

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[37] Here Nora Gilbert also examines Charlotte Brontë's personal experience as a governess and Victorian-era governesses in general, who tended to live their lives 'on the outskirts of action', see 463. Eagleton provides a similar observation, identifying the 'self' of Jane and Brontë's other protagonists as a 'watchful, alien presence on the periphery of others' lives' (Eagleton 24).

4, original italics). Yet this is a risk difficult to avoid. For, since ‘the governess’s free time was not uncommonly spent on her own, even, more specifically, in a room of her own’, this ‘isolated, educated woman’ would more often than not turn to ‘the activity of writing’ (Gilbert 456). Brontë herself resorted to both letter-writing and novel-writing; however, Jane Eyre has nobody to write letters to, so she turns to writing an autobiography. While the actual composition of her autobiography takes places ten years after her stay at Thornfield, she has unconsciously realised the importance, even the necessity of acquiring this power as early as this stage in her life, which is demonstrated most evidently on the night she decides to leave Thornfield (which will be analysed shortly after). As she materialises her inward voice – a silent voice that is confined in both a third-story corridor (Chap. 12) and in her own chamber (Chap. 27) – into written language, Jane finds for it an outlet and a readership beyond herself.[38]

Ivan Kreilkamp points out that, the common metaphor of ‘the author as a speaker’, and especially its application to the un-lyrical genre of the novel, originated in the early Victorian period, when novelists such as Dickens began to read/perform their novels publicly on stage. This ‘metaphorical connection between words on the page and an author’s speaking body’ was unsurprisingly and exclusively masculine, since reading on stage was ‘unavailable to a woman writer’, who were confined in their homes (331). Rejecting the myth of ‘vocal writing’ – that is, the ‘equation of novel-writing with speech’ – Brontë presents Jane Eyre (and later, Lucy Snowe in *Villette*) as demonstrating that ‘female agency derives from the withholding or denial of speech and the silent mastery of language' (Kreilkamp 334). As Groth also notes, Jane 'implicitly valorises silent writing and novel reading as the privileged form of communication, a medium that allows otherwise silenced voices to be heard and unspeakable truths to be articulated' (Lewis 119). Silent mastery of language is what Jane obtains and what Bertha is deprived of; thus, while Jane can find her way out of isolation at Thornfield and the house of Thornfield itself, Bertha must perish with it.

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[38] At the arrival of Blanche Ingram’s party, Jane calls the schoolroom her ‘sanctum’ and ‘a very pleasant refuge in time of trouble’ (193). Just as the third-story corridor is the spatial extension of the attic (based on Jane and Bertha’s auditory interaction), the schoolroom is the spatial extension of Jane’s bedroom, based on her position as the governess.

Stricken by the knowledge of Rochester's existing and ongoing marriage, Jane locks herself in her bedroom. After a conversation with her inward voice, she is determined to leave. That night, Jane falls into a trance-like dream, bringing her back to the night in the red-room:

> The light that long ago had struck me into syncope […] seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause in the centre of the obscured ceiling. I lifted up my head to look: *the roof resolved to clouds*, high and dim […] I watched [the moon] come—watched with the strangest anticipation; as though *some word of doom were to be written on her disc*. (367, my italics)

In Jane's dream, both temporal and spatial boundaries are broken, and the obscured ceiling – the separation between her room and Bertha's – melts into a pathway for the illuminating moon to approach Jane and give guidance. Here, metaphorical ambiguities arise as to whether Bertha's attic is also illuminated by the moon or if it simply *gives way to* the moon. The latter seems more reasonable, for Jane's anticipation that 'some word of doom were to be written' on the moon's disc again points to the guiding and defining power of written language, which is denied Bertha. Either way, the ‘word of doom’ is whispered to Jane’s heart, presenting itself as another ‘inward voice’, silent to the rest of the world. Jane follows it, leaving Thornfield quietly in the midst of night – not only is she escaping the patriarchal mansion and Rochester, but she also leaves Bertha behind, her alter ego who has voiced for her and who cannot but be trapped here till death, for she cannot read the ‘word of doom’.

At this point, it is necessary to pause and look back at Jane’s traumatising experience in her childhood, when she was locked up in the red room. Gilbert and Gubar acutely identify the red-room incident (and more generally, the unspecified ‘that day’ which opens the narrative) as a paradigm for the larger plot of the entire novel: ‘[Jane’s] enclosure in stultifying roles and houses, and her attempts to escape through flight, starvation, and […] madness’ (341). Later, they thoroughly and convincingly explain how Jane makes an attempt to escape Thornfield through the madness of her avatar Bertha. Yet, in their analysis, the most obvious and common feature and expression of such madness does not receive enough attention and discussion, and that is the unintelligible human noise: Bertha’s unintelligible noises are treated as symptoms and evidence of her madness. However, on one level, the concept of ‘noise’ is socially constructed: even meaningful language can be perceived as noise when it fails to gain recognition or legitimacy within its surrounding context. On another level, it is precisely through such unacknowledged and thus disregarded noises that Bertha manages to express the repressed voice of and for Jane, aiding her in her escape.

Locked alone in the dark, red-room, Jane witnesses a strange light gleaming on the wall and gliding to the ceiling. Fear-stricken, she utters a ‘wild, involuntary cry’, a ‘dreadful noise’ similar to the silence-breaking cry Bertha uttered when attacking Mason. Her cry attracts the maids Bessie and Abbot, and then Mrs Reed. Yet when she voices her distress to them, the simple and clear request ‘Take me out! Let me go into the nursery!’ is immediately dismissed, and her urgent cry is understood as ‘artifice’ and ‘tricks’ (*JE* 21). When the speaker is powerless and unadmitted by her society, her words are but noises – if their meanings are not accepted, in a sense, they are unintelligible. Just as Heathcliff’s ‘gibberish’ might well be a coherent, valid language but is unrecognised by the northern England Earnshaws, it is quite possible that Bertha’s ‘eccentric murmurs’ are intelligible in her native land, in spite of her madness. As Sophia Rosenfeld points out, the definition of ‘noise’ is ‘largely socially and ideologically determined’ (318). In fact, there is one instance in which Bertha’s words are understood at Thornfield: when she attacks Mason, the man – her kin of blood and culture – tells Rochester in fear that ‘she said she’d drain my heart’ (*JE* 246). Since her language is unrecognised at Thornfield and dismissed as unintelligible, Bertha retreats and resorts to the more violent, primal noises that are indeed unintelligible. As Jane arrives at Thornfield and establishes the complex auditory connection with Bertha, a tension between accepted language and unaccepted nonsense is also built up. Just as with Jane’s childhood experience, the acceptability/intelligibility of language is decided not by established linguistic criteria, but by existing social norms and power relationships.

Ultimately, Bertha circumvents societal restrictions on female speech through ‘demonic laughs’ and ‘eccentric murmurs’, expressing the suppressed voice of and for Jane; however, based on an unspoken bond between her and Jane, her ‘voice’ is meaningful only to Jane. Otherwise, she is socially silent. Unlike Jane, she could not transform her ‘inward voice’ into written language, endowing power on her silence and escape from her circumstances. Therefore, when Jane leaves Thornfield following the moon’s ‘word of doom’ (a language inaccessible to Bertha), Bertha’s fate is sealed. Months later, Bertha will act out Jane’s desire, burning down Thornfield and falling dead from the ruin. Her death and Thornfield’s ‘death’ will – through the mysterious event of Rochester’s call for Jane – pave the way for Jane towards ‘a marriage of equality’ and ‘wholeness within herself’ (Gilbert and Gubar 362). Yet, as early as this night, Bertha has already experienced a symbolic, prophetic death through the destruction of her own room: her attic dissolves and makes way for Jane’s escape route. While the attic, as a prison, is the miniature version of Thornfield to Bertha, as she could not escape like Jane, the destruction of the attic/Thornfield must be accompanied by her own ruin. At the same time, the melting of the ‘obscured ceiling’ that separates Jane’s and Bertha’s rooms also means that their spaces are now completely interconnected. Therefore, when Jane finally escapes through the ‘broken’ ceiling guided by the moonlight, she also takes with her the legacy Bertha leaves to her: the transformation from expressing suppressed silence through unaccepted, unintelligible language to realising power through the silent, written language.

3. St John Rivers, Rochester, and Silence of the Autobiography

After leaving Thornfield, Jane Eyre wanders a long way towards the doorstep of Marsh End (Moor House), where her first encounter with her relatives re-enacts and reiterates the experiences and knowledge she has gained at Thornfield. Peeping through the lattice window, she witnesses a scene of domesticity, with two young women reading by the hearth.[39] The scene first presents itself to Jane in such a silence that she can hear the 'cinders fall from the grate', and then the silence is broken by the reading and discussion of the German language:

> And in a low voice she read something, of which *not one word was intelligible to me*; for it was in an unknown tongue […] At a later day, I knew the language and the book; therefore, I will here quote the line: though, when I first heard it, it was only like a stroke on sounding brass to me – *conveying no meaning*.
>
> '"Da trat hervor Einer, anzusehen wie die Sternen Nacht." Good! Good!' (382, my italics)

Bertha's words are unacknowledged at Thornfield due to her madness and her 'barbaric', Creole cultural background (that is, from a Eurocentric perspective), and are dismissed as mere sounds. Yet for a well-educated governess without relevant training, German is also but a sound, and is as unintelligible to a non-German speaker as Bertha's eccentric murmurs. However, as Jane learns the language, she becomes capable of transcribing the unintelligible sounds into meaningful written words. As it turns out, one thing that Jane keeps working on during her days at Marsh End is precisely learning languages – initially German, followed by Hindostanee. Through the acquisition of new languages, previously unintelligible sounds becomes intelligible to Jane, and this is a reciprocal process: as Jane masters these languages, she also become capable of conveying her thoughts – her inward voice – to those who previously could not understand them.

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[39] This scene echoes the opening scene of the novel and shows the change in Jane's station throughout her life journey. In the first chapter, she is driven away from the domestic hearth and a family that does not accept her; here, she starts as an unexpected guest, but is eventually welcomed into her real family and fire-side domesticity.

Furthermore, the Marsh End episode is also a reiteration of Jane's experience with silence in Lowood and Thornfield. When Diana tells Jane that St John Rivers 'looks quiet' but 'hides a fever in his vitals', the remark resonates with Jane's opinion of Helen Burns. While Bertha shows herself as a violent madwoman, Mason has not expected her attack for she 'looked so quiet at first' (*JE* 245). Above all, throughout the story, the primary character who looks quiet but is hiding a fever in vitals is undoubtedly Jane herself, who inherits a legacy from Helen and who has Bertha as her alter ego. Just as Jane tries to make Helen talk and just as Rochester tries to make *her* talk, she is determined to make St John express his feelings for Rosamond Oliver. In fact, what Jane does in this conversation – she '"burst[s]" with boldness and good-will into "the silent sea" of [St John's soul]', digging out frank sentiments from a reserved person – is a reproduction of her conversation with Helen by the fireside and of her conversation with Rochester-disguised-as-Gypsy.

In this way, the Marsh End episode reemphasises the silence-related themes in Lowood and Thornfield episode: that silence (active or passive) is a sociological rhetorical device reflecting power relations, and that the unintelligibility of language is at times a social construct, which may find a solution in the silent power of literate, written words. Marsh End serves as both a recapitulation of previous stages and a prelude to the narrative's concluding climax.

As Jane is on the verge of accepting St John's proposal as a missionary's wife, she hears a mysterious call from a far distant Rochester. Following this apparent summons, she returns to Thornfield, learns of its destruction and Bertha's death, and ultimately locates Rochester at Ferndean. Rochester is now maimed and blind, and his blindness is a significant symbol of the transformation in the power relations. This time, when Jane examines him without being seen (echoing her own half-hiding behind the curtain in Thornfield's drawing-room), her invisibility marks the powerlessness of Rochester, rather than her own peripheral social position. More importantly, Rochester's blindness forces him to recognise and locate Jane solely by her voice. At Ferndean, a secluded place 'as still as a church on a week-day' (*JE* 497), Jane's previously suppressed, withheld voice gained power and recognition. She describes her conversations with Rochester as an 'audible thinking' (519), linking her vocal speech with her inward voice, a connection that simultaneously empowers both aspects.

Yet, Jane still seems to prefer the silent written language, a preference reflected in one of the most problematic details at the story's end: reunited with Rochester, Jane talks at length with him, and tells him in detail her experience in the past year. However, when Rochester gives his side of the account of the mysterious call, Jane makes no disclosure in return: 'The coincidence struck me as too awful and inexplicable to be communicated or discussed […] I kept these things then, and pondered them in my heart' (516). The thoughts 'in her heart', then, are materialised into written words and conveyed to a readership in the form of an ‘autobiography’. Jane’s concealment of this detail to Rochester is a demonstration of her powerful, self-asserting silence: it is her freedom to choose silence rather than being forced into it. By withholding speech, she opens up a ‘new space of interiority’ in her heart, and by transforming her thoughts into written words, she constructs an ‘authorial identity’ (Kreilkamp 338).

Still, this authorial identity seems somewhat fragile, as the autobiography upon which it is based appears to retain some inherent contradictions in terms of silence and communication. Randall Craig notes a feeling of logophobia throughout *Jane Eyre*. The fear about language, he argues, takes two different forms in the novel: the fear that ‘words are too weak to serve human needs’ or that ‘human needs are too frail to survive verbal expression’ (92). This first type of logophobia is found when Jane sometimes gets overwhelmed by feelings and finds them inexpressible, thus she is struck silent. The second type is illustrated through imposed silence on Jane in her childhood and on Mason, when Rochester warns that ‘one careless word’ by Mason could ruin Rochester’s life (*JE* 250). Based on this framework, Craig points to a pattern of ‘quietude infrequently but convulsively ruptured by speech that characterises Jane throughout her life’ (101). Mrs Reed identifies this pattern on her deathbed when she wonders how ‘for nine years [Jane] could be patient and quiescent under any treatment, and in the tenth break out all fire and violence’ (*JE* 276). She is remarking on the two quarrels Jane had with her at the age of ten, shortly before Jane leaves Gateshead for Lowood (34, 43-5), but these words contained as a tiny part of the novel also apply to the novel itself as a whole – an autobiographical narrative composed at the tenth year after the narrator’s marriage (519). Viewed from the level of narrator-reader, this somewhat self-referring structure concerning imposed silence and its reactionary outburst becomes increasingly complicated.

Considering that the autobiographical narrative is in effect a lengthy, written monologue uttered by the narrator to the reader, its frequent mention of the narrator’s quietness and silence seems to affirm the previous pattern: that the monologue is indeed a reactionary outburst towards the imposed silence in the narrator’s previous life, recorded throughout the monologic narrative. Yet it is in this silence-rejecting narrative that more silence is created and depicted. Of course, having gone through the analysis in previous sections, this contradiction is readily resolved: we, the readers – along with Jane herself – now understand that silence is not the equivalent of powerlessness. This autobiography is a faithful record of Jane Eyre’s comprehension and application of this knowledge.

However, there is one question remaining about the composition of this autobiography: why, exactly, does Jane Eyre write this autobiography at this particular moment? It is not written immediately after some of the most meaningful events in Jane’s own life: the revelation of her identity as part of the Rivers family and her new life as an heiress, her marriage with Rochester, the recovery of Rochester’s eyesight two years after their marriage, or the birth of their first-born (the time of which is not even specified). Rather, this autobiography seems to have been inspired by another person’s life event – St John Rivers’s impending death – which concludes the novel:

> St John is unmarried: he never will marry now. […] The last letter I received from him drew from my eyes human tears, and yet filled my heart with divine joy […] I know that a stranger's hand will write to me next, to say that the good and faithful servant has been called at length into the joy of his Lord. […] His own words are a pledge of this: –
>
> 'My Master,' he says, 'has forewarned me. Daily he announces more distinctly, "Surely I come quickly!" and hourly I more eagerly respond, "Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!"' (521)

As a record of Jane's experience with silence and the power she gains from it, the written monologue, which is supposed to convey her 'inward voice' throughout, ends not only in St John's voice, but also in a divine voice. In such, this conclusion seems to silence the human voice of Jane Eyre, and thus undermines the authorial power of the whole autobiography. This usurpation of voice calls back the moment when St John first asks Jane to be a missionary's wife. As St John announces to Jane that he will soon leave for India, he hints at his need for a companion, a hint Jane understands immediately and evades instinctively:

> 'If they are really qualified for the task, will not their own hearts be the first to inform them of it?'
>
> I felt as if an awful charm was framing round and gathering over me: I trembled to hear some fatal word spoken which would at once declare and rivet the spell.

> ‘And what does *your* heart say?’ demanded St John.
>
> ‘*My heart is mute – my heart is mute,*’ I answered, struck and thrilled. (463, my italics)

Jane tries to evade the offer by staying ‘mute’ – even in her heart. Yet in such she yields her voice to the other party, and now St John is able to ‘speak for [her heart]’ and states the offer clearly, requesting her to become his ‘helpmeet and fellow-labourer’ (463-4). It is exactly her fear of ‘some fatal word spoken’ that causes the fatal word to be spoken immediately.

A similar fear or evasion seems to lurk behind the composition of Jane’s autobiography. It begins (or is inspired by) and ends at another person’s voice, so that her own voice will not get into direct confrontation with any other voice. Yet this is achieved at the expense of silencing her own voice to some extent. While Jane is eager that her ‘tale could be listened to’ (372) – a need even greater than material needs during her wandering from Thornfield to Marsh End – she cannot help but hide her voice in her own monologic autobiography. This application of the written language resonates with Jane’s behaviour of half hiding behind the curtain as the marginalised governess at Thornfield. As Farkas puts it, Jane uses ‘darkness, silence and a practiced skill at making herself inconspicuous to protect herself, to keep her thoughts, feelings and personality safely *locked away* where they cannot be used against her’ (55). Although Jane has acquired the ability to gain power and interiority through written language, and although she addresses her reader directly throughout the autobiography, she still seems to harbour apprehensions about this action. Hence, she envelops her voice with that of St John and God, which, to some extent, reiterates its essence as an ‘inward voice’ on a narrative level by creating a semi-boundary separating the reader and her narrative.

However, this curious ending offers an alternative interpretation, one that reveals an eccentric, underlying pattern in Jane Eyre’s life journey and interpersonal relationships. The completion of the autobiography is another milestone in Jane’s life journey: just as she left Gateshead, Lowood, or Thornfield, the composition and closure of this autobiographical narrative allows her to summarise her past life, gain interiority, and move on to the next phase of her life. More importantly, this closure is achieved with the help of St John’s (impending) death. Like Helen and Bertha, he too grants her a legacy through his death: although Jane has acquired the power of silent, written language at Thornfield, partly through her position as a governess and partly through Bertha, the written language becomes less necessary within the enclosed and isolated world of Ferndean. There, her contact with the outside world is limited, and in her intimate relationship with Rochester, she speaks freely; between them, ‘audible thinking’ renders written language unnecessary. Nevertheless, when St. John, who as a missionary in the other side of the world functions as an adequate representation of the external society, sends a letter (another form of written language) which includes his dialogue with God, the impulse and even necessity to express herself and to communicate with a wider audience through the written language arises again. In this sense, while Bertha’s death endows Jane the power of written language, it is St John’s death that prompts her to exercise it, by composing this autobiography which intermittently addresses 'the reader', and which confirms that she has now gained the total control of her life narrative.

4. Conclusion

As a Bildungsroman, *Jane Eyre* narrates the heroine's journey through a series of physical and emotional landscapes, charting her movement from one place to another, and her confrontation with both external and internal challenges. This chapter explores how such growth is, to a significant extent, articulated through Jane's evolving relationship with silence. At Gateshead, she is silenced against her will. At Lowood, through Helen Burns, she learns to deploy silence as a mode of self-assertion. At Thornfield, she and her proxy Bertha form an unconscious alliance through space and sound: by employing the marginalised position of a governess and the space she unconsciously shares with Bertha (Jane's chamber and Bertha's attic), Jane seizes the power of silent writing, and uses it to find a way out of interpersonal isolation and the constraints of hierarchical power. At Marsh End, she consolidates the forms of silence she has previously acquired, reaffirming the strategic uses of silence. Finally, at Ferndean, in the presence of Rochester, who is to some extent a witness of her maturation in terms of her relationship of silence, Jane integrates and expresses these multiple forms of empowered silence in the text that is the autobiographical *Jane Eyre*. As a work of Jane's journey with silence, a work meant for an audience beyond herself and the enclosed world of Ferndean, this autobiography ultimately affirms her interiority and subjectivity.

Chapter Four: Surveillance and Narrative Silence in *Villette*

The previous two chapters have explored two different forms of silence and their respective functions in depth. The present chapter turns to *Villette*, a novel likewise structured around silence, both on the level of plot and narrative. However, this time, silence is situated in a markedly different context. Following *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë published *Shirley* in 1849 and *Villette* in 1853. While both later novels continue her thematic preoccupation with silence, they develop this interest through distinct emphases and overlapping motifs. One recurring element shared by *Shirley* and *Villette* is the action of eavesdropping or overhearing. In *Shirley*, however, this motif is embedded within the act of listening in general and will be examined in detail in the next chapter. The present chapter focuses on the relationship between the representation of eavesdropping/overhearing (and by extension, surveillance/witnessing) and silence in *Villette*. In *Villette*, overhearing/eavesdropping – as well as spying and surveillance – become so common and ubiquitous, that they function as far more than a literary device simply to drive the plot on. The action of secret watching/listening itself here becomes a theme of the novel, an indispensable element in understanding the story. This element is keenly noticed by the novel's protagonist Lucy Snowe, who describes the *Pensionnat* – the main setting of the story – as 'a strange house, where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine' (*Villette* 258).

The first point to note about the actions under discussion is that, eavesdropping and spying in *Villette* are largely equivalent to each other, both centred on obtaining information that one is not supposed to know, with no hierarchy established between the two senses. As Lucy and Paul Emmanuel grow more intimate, with a hint of romantic love gradually developing between the two, they become subjected to dual surveillance/eavesdropping by Madame Beck and Père Silas. Lucy's description of her predicament reflects the interchangeability of such secret watching and listening:

> We were under the surveillance of a sleepless eye: Rome watched jealously her son through that mystic lattice at which I had knelt once, and to which M. Emanuel drew nigh month by month – the sliding panel of the confessional. (*Villette* 453)

In this sentence, the image of spying through the confessional lattice shifts smoothly to the act of verbal confession.

Yet, before considering the religious, cultural and social contexts of the actions, eavesdropping and spying/surveillance in *Villette* are, by definition, an invasion of privacy and a breach of boundaries between individuals. In stark contrast to such invasion and breaches of boundaries that appear everywhere in the novel, silence is another element that is ubiquitous throughout the story, particularly in relation to the heroine Lucy Snowe and on two levels: as a character, Lucy is reticent and quiet; as a narrator, she is often evasive and leaves multiple gaps in her narration. The two-fold silence in *Villette* has received considerable attention by scholars: earlier critics such as Helene Moglen (190-229) and Gilbert and Gubar (399-440) view such silence as either a sign of repression or a loss of power and identity, whereas recent critics tend to evaluate it more positively. Emily Heady believes the silence, presented in a typological narrative mode, challenges the Gothic and Realist novelistic modes, both of which tend to reveal the inner life to the public and thus dispel its authority.[40] Ivan Kreilkamp argues that withheld speech in *Villette* is yet another of Brontë's attempts to reject the equation between silence and powerlessness, and to 'argue against the metaphor of authorship as storytelling' following her emphasis on silence in *Jane Eyre*; Lucy's refusal to speak up allows her the 'mastery of texts' – of 'the flow of print and information' (344).

Other critics have also focused on the omnipresent atmosphere of surveillance in the novel. Micael M. Clarke pinpoints it as a feature that 'characterises *Villette's* Catholic culture' (977). Margaret Shaw notices how it is a gendered, male dominant act, for which Lucy preserves 'an interior for her central character that resisted representation and (male) control' (814). Joseph Boone argues that *Villette* dramatises a Foucauldian 'carceral society' where pervasive surveillance and self-regulation intertwine with gendered power dynamics, yet the novel simultaneously opens narrative space for subversive resistance and autoerotic agency through Lucy Snowe's strategic invisibility and 'control of the gaze' (22). Sally Shuttleworth links the pervasive surveillance in *Villette* to Victorian psychological theory and mechanisms of social control, arguing that surveillance from 'religious, educational, and medical figures' forms the psychological nightmare from which Lucy seeks to escape and to assert control over her own self-definition (242). Sandro Jung contends that *Villette* intricately juxtaposes two models of female detection – one emotional and self-reflexive, the other rational and institutionalised – to reveal how female curiosity and surveillance enable Lucy Snowe to forge 'an identity of intellectual and emotional independence' (161).

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[40] Following George Landow's definition that typology as a system of progressive revelation that views the historical, material world and events as predictive or meaningful for a future, spiritual reality, Heady argues that, Lucy's silence both as a character and a narrator reveals the author's emphasis on the unspeakable quality of spirituality and inner life.

However, there remains a lack of adequate discussion on the connection between silence and surveillance in *Villette*. Critics such as Shaw and Leila S. May have simply regarded Lucy's silence as a reaction to the surveillance. This chapter will be centred on the idea that in *Villette*, the acts of eavesdropping/surveillance and silence at all levels are intimately connected, and the connection is much more than an action-reaction one. Through the figure of the ghostly nun, a silent *surveillante*, Lucy is closely connected to the *Pensionnat*, which is a house that at once threatens and supports the establishment of her identity. Lucy's subsequent quest for a safe place to reside is addressed with circumnarration, a form of narrative silence and a progress that moves between public translation and private en/decryption, operating simultaneously inside and outside the narrative. With an encrypted text aimed at a selected range of readers, the narrator and the author creates a safe place to assert their identity which is free from surveillance.

1. The Nun as the *Surveillante*

Lucy Snowe, the protagonist of *Villette*, is characterised by her reticence – she is constantly silent. Kristen Pond argues that Lucy's silence is a positive, ethical rhetorical action that allows her to 'manage relationships with other characters and the reader', and such silence works ethically because it is a rejection of the social convention of categorising individuals through (often fragmented) information/knowledge of them; in other words, by staying silent in response to other people's questions or assumptions about her, Lucy keeps her self-image intact and unified. In contrast to Lucy's ethical silence, Pond notes that Mme. Beck's surveillance is an 'unethical act of silence' because she 'presumes full comprehension of someone's identity through the partial knowledge she gathers' (773). However, in reality, Lucy practices the same unethical act of silence just like Mme. Beck. Just as Helen H. Davis points out, 'What remains unnarrated is that Lucy is as observant in her snooping as her superior – and sometimes even more successful' (208). Here Davis is especially insightful, for she makes it clear that not only is Lucy a secret observer, but she – as the narrator – also keeps her position 'unnarrated', and this intentional hiding is the first encounter between silence and surveillance on the narrative level.

To begin with, Shaw realises that 'the secret of Lucy's power as an observer is that she, like Madame Beck, is not fully observable; she is not readable' (818). Within the narrative, Mme. Beck must hide herself away when she spies on the secrets of the *Pensionnat*'s staff and students (whether her hiding is successful or not is another matter), and so does Lucy. Late in volume I, during the fête of Mme. Beck, after being coerced into playing a role on stage, Lucy withdraws to 'a quiet nook, whence unobserved [she] could observe' the ball's splendour and the secret chemistry between certain characters (*Villette* 156). Like Mme. Beck, the character Lucy is good at, and used to, hiding herself for the sake of secretly watching others. Furthermore, the narrator Lucy tends to keep such a stance on a higher, narrative level: when she spies and eavesdrops on other people, she even removes herself from the narrated picture. Slightly earlier in the fête chapter, Lucy informs us that the entire school has to chip in to prepare a gift for Mme. Beck, and they eventually decide to buy a quite expensive one. During the process, Mme. Beck would hint to Mademoiselle St Pierre, who is in charge of the celebration, about the gift she wants, while pretending to be oblivious to the crowd's gift-preparation. In order to reveal the headmistress's hypocrisy, Lucy shares with the reader 'a brief, secret consultation' that has *probably* taken place 'in madame's own chamber':

> 'What will you have this year?' was asked by her Parisian lieutenant.
>
> 'Oh, no matter! Let it alone. Let the poor children keep their francs,' And Madame *looked benign and modest.*
>
> The St. Pierre *would* here *protrude her chin*; she knew Madame by heart; she always called her airs of 'bonté' – 'des grimaces.' She never even professed to respect them one instant.
>
> 'Vite!' she *would say* coldly. 'Name the article. Shall it be jewellery or porcelain, haberdashery or silver?'
>
> 'Eh bien! Deux ou trois cuillers, et autant de fourchettes en argent.'
>
> And the result was a handsome case, containing 300 francs worth of plate.
>
> (*Villette* 141-2, my italics).

The conditional mood half way through this quotation makes it clear that the direct speech and vivid description of the two women's demeanour and expression are only the narrator's plausible imagination based on her knowledge of them. Yet, the narrator's assured tone, when accompanied by her emphasis on the secrecy of the conversation (a *secret* consultation in one's own *room*), somehow leads the reader to suspect that she has actually overheard the beginning of the conversation and has guessed the rest of it, which would explain the change of grammatical tense mid-way. While the emphasis on the conversation's secrecy is supposed to illustrate the headmistress's hidden nature, it also puts the 'imagined' conversation itself into doubt, and pushes the reader to ask: is it really imagined, or is it heard, but disguised as imagined? After all, the reader soon discovers that Lucy is indeed an unreliable narrator who deliberately withholds important information from her reader.

The most telling example of Lucy's unreliability as a narrator is that she does not mention her recognition of Dr John as Graham Bretton, her childhood acquaintance. Neither the reader outside the narrative or Dr John inside the narrative are informed of this important fact until several chapters later. It is interesting to note that, in the scene in which Lucy recognises Dr John, the 'little oval mirror' she uses to secretly observe him is the same mirror used by Mme. Beck to 'secretly [spy on] persons walking in the garden below' (108). Here, the tool for snooping connects Lucy and Mme. Beck through their shared spying activities. Thus, just as Dr John can in turn notice Lucy's spying on him through the reflection of the mirror, Mme. Beck in spying over her *Pensionnat* is more than once caught by the target of her surveillance, most successfully by her fellow secret-watcher Lucy.

Mme. Beck's surveillance on Lucy, and Lucy's counter-surveillance in response, begins on the first night Lucy arrives at the school. After travelling through a series of rooms that reminds Lucy of the building's history as a convent, she falls asleep in her bed and wakes up in the middle of the night. Having realised that Mme. Beck is silently watching by her side, she chooses to feign sleep, and as Mme. Beck turns to rummage through her personal belongings, Lucy opens her eyes to quietly observe all the details of the headmistress's actions (*Villette* 76-7). She is curious about the conclusions Mme. Beck draws from her inspection and her final judgement of Lucy, but quickly realises that 'Madame's face of stone […] betrayed no response'. Lucy can only catch Mme. Beck's quiet surveillance of her, but she cannot infer from it what information the headmistress has obtained. Similarly, in the scene where she recognises Dr John herself, both the reader and Dr John can only catch the action of her quiet observation, but the knowledge she obtains from this act is concealed in the silence both within and without the narrative.

The detailed similarities between Lucy and Mme. Beck when they spy on others (as well as their confrontation acts of surveillance and counter-surveillance on each other) reflects the high degree of interconnectedness between their shared aspects as secret watchers. Near the end of the story, Mme. Beck tries to prevent Lucy from meeting Paul, who is about to leave for Guadeloupe, and this brings about the only heated argument that takes place between the two women; Lucy refers to Mme. Beck as her 'rival, heart and soul, though secretly, under the smoothest bearing, and utterly unknown to all save her and [Lucy herself]'. Lucy believes so because she knows that she has entered into 'some of Madame's secrets', just as Madame knows some of hers (*Villette* 494). Hence, among other factors, their similar habit of secretly (and thus silently) watching people is undoubtedly one of the key components of this rivalry. In Lucy Snowe, both as a character and as a narrator, silence and spying/surveillance are two sides of the same coin: silence works as an approach simultaneously to dodge others' spying, to act out her own spying within the narrative, and to avoid judgement on her action from without the narrative.

In her analysis, Shaw explores the emphasis on the act of 'observation' in *Villette* and how it becomes a technique as well as a theme in the novel. She points out that Brontë describes Lucy's observing as 'accidental and unconscious, or when intentional, at least honest and with a reform function in mind', and that she only reads public information that is 'laid open' before her, for she is often ignored by other people, including the target of her observation. Therefore, her 'gaze', which is different from the spying male gaze (Mme. Beck's is believed to be a male gaze, for she often adopts a man's aspect), is a power 'made available to her, not by her' (823-4). In other words, according to Shaw, Lucy's act of observation and Mme. Beck's spying/surveillance are essentially different; while the former is ethical, the latter is unethical.

On the face of it, this is indeed the case, and there are clear moral accusations made by Lucy regarding Mme. Beck's, and Paul's, acts of spying (*Villette* 76-7, 403-6). However, Lucy's own narration about her action and Mme. Beck's – the surveillance and counter-surveillance on the first night, and her self-acknowledged rivalry with Mme. Beck – place the two in direct opposition under the same context. Additionally, the two women's shared means of observation – such as the oval mirror – suggests that, the line between Lucy's and Mme. Beck's behaviour is extremely blurred, just as the line between overhearing and eavesdropping is difficult to determine. For instance, when Lucy hears Mme. Walravens and Père Silas's party discuss about their plan for Paul on Midsummer night, she undergoes an invisible shift from accidental overhearing to intentional eavesdropping. As Karen Lawrence puts it, while Lucy is indeed a transparent person who tends to be ignored due to her position and disposition, this invisibility which is ‘as good to [her] as cloak and hood of hodden gray’ (49) also become an active strategy for her to avoid being read by others, and to enable her to read more than others. This power is both made available to her and by her.

Yet, although Lucy is to some degree a *de facto* secret watcher, and that her action is often intentional and not necessarily ethical, she still believes that she is essentially different from Mme. Beck. Lucy distinguishes her action from that of Mme. Beck not only through its morality, but also through the national and cultural identity of the agent. Back on Lucy’s first night at the *Pensionnat*, when she silently outspies Mme. Beck’s spying of her and another English-speaking teacher, Mrs Svini,[41] she sees all of it as ‘very un-English’ (*Villette* 77). Indeed, from the narrator’s own point of view, she undoubtedly sees the omnipresent spying and eavesdropping that pervade the school, and sometimes the entire city of Villette, as a very local act – more specifically, one that is closely associated with Catholicism.

Clarke notes that throughout the novel, ‘spying and surveillance are represented as instruments of social control in Roman Catholic society, necessary in the absence of the internal self-discipline that characterises the English Protestant’ (977). After Paul confesses his interactions with Lucy and their religious discussions to his trusted Père Silas, and after the priest has ‘closely watched’ Lucy, ascertaining that Lucy visits the three Protestant churches in Villette indiscriminately, he offers to give Lucy religious guidance (*Villette* 463-4). Although confession is an act of active disclosure (rather than being passively and unconsciously spied/eavesdropped on by the priest), it is clearly a form of surveillance from Lucy's point of view: the anthropomorphic Catholic church (personified as a jealous mother) watching Paul through the 'mystic lattice', immediately reminds the reader of how both Paul himself and Mme. Beck spy on staff and students through the lattices of the *Pensionnat*. In fact, the boarding school itself, imagined as a strange house with spying eyes in every corner – and a former convent in reality – further reinforces the narrator's idea that the systematic surveillance in the novel is a product of the non-English, Continental Catholicism. This connection invites the reader to consider the most important symbolic element of the novel in a new light: the ghostly phantom of the nun.

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[41] While Mrs Svini is actually an Irish whose disguised English identity is later questioned and dismissed by Lucy, at this moment, this scene highlights the non-English surveillance upon the English, and Lucy’s English, counter-surveillance as a reactionary action becomes ethical. For Lucy’s displacement of Mrs Svini as part of the construction of Lucy’s English identity, see Lawson and Shakinovsky, pp. 934-5.

Due to its complexity of meaning and its importance in the plot, the image of the nun has been explored in depth by many critics. The symbol is often understood as an externalised self of Lucy, which appears at moments of her emotional turbulence, representing self-repression, forbidden desire, anti-Catholicism, and anxiety about 'her very right to exist'.[42] In other words, critics have tended to understand the nun as a symbol either directly related to Lucy herself or (through Justine Marie, the deceased nun and the important obstacle to her union with Paul) indirectly related to her. Yet in her influential analysis, Mary Jacobus points out that the nun is a moving symbol, at once 'real and spectral', and has different functions for different characters, including but not limited to Lucy: '[the] different meanings intersect but do not merge' (51-2). Of the many possible meanings of the nun, one that has not yet received substantial discussion is its aspect of the *surveillante*. In fact, three weeks after (or, on a materialised textual level, three pages after) Lucy's first confrontation with the nun's apparition in the attic, it is Mme. Beck who is connected with the ghost from the narrator's perspective, rather than Lucy herself. On one evening, when Lucy is walking by herself in the school, she suddenly thinks of the nun, and believes she does not fear her. Just at this moment, she hears 'breathing and rustling' from behind her, and turns to witness a shadow that 'glides' before her – but it is not her 'gaunt nun', only 'Madame Beck on duty' (*Villette* 283). Looking back, from her very first appearance, Mme. Beck has demonstrated spectral traits, shown in Lucy's self-comforting, negative description that 'no ghost stood beside [her], nor anything of spectral aspect' (71). In order to spy on others without being outspied, Mme. Beck always wears shoes that are soft and silent, and 'glide ghost-like through the house' (81).

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[42] Gilbert and Gubar 425. Also see E. D. H. Johnson 325-36 and Toni Wein 733-46.

The nun's appearances in the novel are believed to have occurred at moments when Lucy is undergoing violent emotional turbulences and when she is trying to repress her desires and impulses. However, they also symbolise the *de facto* other – people other than herself, rather than the externalised self, who seek to monitor Lucy's personal moments. To a large extent, the nun appears at every moment when Mme. Beck would surely want to spy on Lucy but is unable to – first, when Lucy hides upstairs in the garret from everyone's gaze (especially Mme. Beck's) to read the letter from Dr John, with whom she is secretly in love. Later, when Lucy becomes annoyed at how Mme. Beck has stolen her letters for the second time and even shown them to Paul, she buries them under the old pear tree in the garden and mourns her loss; as if responding to Lucy's attempt to conceal, the nun appears again (329-30).

Soon after Lucy buries the letter, she mentions that Mme. Beck has decided to 'leave [her] alone with [her] liberty' as a present for her, and has 'with quiet hand removed' every shackle she had previously placed upon Lucy (331). At this point, the nun *surveillante* and the secular *surveillante* Mme. Beck seem to separate from each other. However, Paul soon takes over the supervision of Lucy, telling Lucy straightforwardly that he '[has] his eye on [Lucy]', and blaming Mme. Beck for allowing Lucy's unrestricted action (334-5).[43] Yet his surveillance on Lucy is different from that of Mme. Beck, and Lucy indeed reacts differently. In fact, Lucy displays a neutral and even positive acceptance of Paul's casual invasion of her privacy (380-2), whereas Paul does not hide his surveillance from Lucy. Later, when the two debate in the garden alley about the immorality of surveillance, Paul mentions the figure of the nun, and the nun appears accordingly (403-8). The growing relationship between Lucy and Paul turns Paul's surveillance on Lucy into an act that is known to both parties, that can be talked about openly, and that is not distasteful to Lucy. This causes the act to lose its deterrent and controlling qualities. Thus, the nun's appearance on this occasion is directed not only at Lucy, but also at Paul. Her appearance as the substitute *surveillante* after Paul's surveillance has lost its restrictiveness seems to emphasise that there is not a single conversation in this school that is not really being spied on/listened to, even when the supposed *surveillant* is not working properly.[44] It can also be seen as an ironical warning for Paul and Lucy: when they are spying on others, they are likewise being spied on by others. As their relationship develops, out of personal interest, both Père Silas and Mme. Beck want to prevent them from falling in love or getting married. Just as Paul is about to confess his feelings for Lucy, again in the garden alley, the interlopers appear as 'two bodeful forms – a woman's and a priest's' (488). Here the nun figure is split into two, with Père Silas representing its religious aspect, and Mme. Beck representing its female aspect; they are connected through the identity of the '*surveillante*', both literally and metaphorically. At this point, due to the change in Paul's relationship with Lucy – he has become the one who shares Lucy's secrets rather than the one who monitors them – Mme. Beck is re-identified with the nun figure.

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[43] It is worth noting that, within the story, Mme. Beck's decision to stop her surveillance on Lucy is not directly related to Lucy's burial of the letter, but is rather narrated as an interpolated passage, the time of which not specified: after Mme. Beck leaves school for a fortnight and finds that the school is functioning as usual, she expresses gratitude to the teachers, and, unlike the other teachers who are given gifts, Lucy is given the promise of freedom. The reason that Paul strengthens surveillance on Lucy has nothing to do with Dr John, but is because Lucy begins to leave school regularly in order to study German with Polly. However, in Lucy's narration, these three events appear in immediate sequence: (1) the burial of the letter and the witness of the nun, (2) Mme. Beck's promise to loosen the surveillance, and (3) Paul's claim to Lucy that he is spying on her and his complaint about Mme. Beck's lenience. To the reader outside the narrative, this arrangement may reflect the narrator's hint that there is a correlation between them.

At the end of the story, when the nun's costume appears on Lucy's bed and is torn to shreds by her, it symbolises that Lucy is about to run away from the 'ghost' that is rooted in this convent on all levels, that is, the omnipresent surveillance rooted in this house: Paul is about to go far abroad, and will not make confession to the priest and disclose Lucy's information anymore; at the same time, he has prepared for Lucy the suburban house to enable her to set up her own school, away from Mme. Beck's eyes. While the *surveillante* actually spies on everyone, for Lucy only the surveillance directed on her is significant to herself. Therefore, when Ginevra Fanshawe writes that '[the] nun of the attic bequeaths to Lucy Snowe her wardrobe. She will be seen in the Rue Fossette no more' (519), it implies double meaning. On the one hand, it refers to Alfred de Hamal, who has previously dressed up as the ghostly nun in order to escape the school's surveillance, and has now left the house of surveillance with Ginevra. On the other hand, it also means that the surveillance on Lucy, symbolised by the image of the nun, will disappear with her departure from this field of surveillance.

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[44] After Lucy hears about Justine Marie's story from Père Silas and tells this to Paul, Paul admits that when he also had witnessed the apparition, it is precisely this deceased nun that comes to his mind, and he hopes that saintly Justine will not 'perturb herself with rivalries of earth' (452). Hence, at this moment, the ghostly nun *surveillante* is connected to the deceased nun.

Gretchen Braun argues that the gothic element in *Villette* is a 'discourse [located] within Lucy's consciousness', and it is within her consciousness that it 'attain[s] supernatural status' (note 12, 210). In a way similar to Jane Eyre, Lucy also adopts the perspective of a 'Gothic reader', and it is only from this perspective that the ghostly nun becomes directly identified with Mme. Beck, and closely connected to Catholicism – that is to say, the figure becomes a collage of elements that are all 'very un-English'. However, as discussed earlier, Lucy herself harbours an aspect of the secret observer that is equal and reciprocal to Mme. Beck, and this correlation subverts her claim that surveillance is associated with a Continental, Catholic other. Also subverting this claim is Lucy's own identification with the figure of the nun: when she is in a distraught state during the long vacation, she feels she must leave the *Pensionnat*, for the house-roof is 'crushing as the slab of a tomb', a metaphor that connects her to the nun who was buried alive in this house. Later, she buries the letters from Dr John – evidence of her love for him – at the bottom of the old pear-tree, and seals the hollow with a slate, again evoking the image of the nun's burial (177, 329). In short, In *Villette*, the author establishes a close, complex, multi-layered correlation between silence and surveillance/eavesdropping. As a reticent character and a reserved narrator, Lucy in fact practices skilful and successful surveillance upon others, rather than staying merely as the object of surveillance. She attempts to distinguish her action of surveillance from that of Mme. Beck in terms of the agents' morality and national identity. While she creates such distinction through a gothic narrative, epitomised by the nun figure, it is exactly this narrative that reconnects her to the nun figure, and thus, Mme. Beck. As a result, the demarcation she builds up is overturned from within.

2. Language, Translation, and En/decryption

Lucy attempts to construct an opposition between English Protestant and Continental Catholic cultures in terms of morality/immorality and open observation/invasive surveillance, yet this claim to nationalism has proved to have been negated by her own spying behaviour and indeed her identification with the ghostly nun at multiple levels. Moreover, the establishment and negation of this opposition is also manifested in another important element of the novel – the language. This section examines how the bilingual use throughout the novel points to a hidden act of translation, which serves as a key to understanding the novel's narrative silence, presented in part through a literal and metaphorical en/decryption process.

Before turning to a detailed discussion of narrative silence, it is necessary to begin with a brief overview of the novel's bilingual use. In their analysis of *Villette*, Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky explore how Lucy undergoes a dramatic shift in her ideas about national and cultural identity, and argues that this shift reflects how national identifications '*themselves* are the products of imagination, invention, and even hallucination' (925). In the novel, this shift is partly manifested in the use of different languages. Lawson and Shakinovsky explore the significance of English for Lucy in the early part of the story. Lucy realises early on that the bounty of England does not belong to her – this homeland is to her but a 'wilderness' and 'desert' (49, 67) – and that she has no choice but to leave the country. When she arrives alone in Villette only to find that her suitcase is lost and she does not know where to go, Lucy is deprived of the last material connection she has with England and English culture. Confused, she meets an Englishman (who much later turns out to be Dr John Graham) who helps her figure out where her luggage is going, points her to an English-speaking inn, and walks her through the night. However, on her way to the inn, she is intimidated by two Labassecourians, who attempt to harass her. These two strangers '[speak] with insolence' and are 'very plebian in soul', as opposed to Dr Graham, the 'true young English gentleman' (69-70). Here, a strong opposition is constructed between the spiteful French-speaking Labassecourians and the respectful English-speaking English. Panicked, Lucy gets lost again and ends up at her original destination, Mme. Beck's *Pensionnat*, which, though not English-speaking, is looking for an English teacher. Out of fear and rejection of this alien environment characterised by an unfamiliar foreign language, the displaced protagonist must cling to her identification with England. Hence, she resorts to 'her last

English possession, the English language', and is admitted to the *Pensionnat*, while using her employment to build a new life in a strange land (Lawson and Shakinovsky 934).

Lucy establishes herself as an English teacher, and the ultimate value and meaning of this identity lie in its 'Englishness', as opposed to the very un-English, French-speaking Catholic culture surrounding her. Whilst she initially harbours a significant bias against this new culture, as the plot progresses, she gradually becomes emotionally more attached to the opposing side that she has established herself against. Michael L. Ross explores the novel's use of the French language, pointing out that the abundance of French language in the novel does not stem simply from the author's nostalgia for her time in Belgium and for her mentor Constantin Heger, nor is it 'authorial whim'. Rather, it is a careful artistic design that '[performs] valuable rhetorical work', reflecting Lucy's shifts in her attitude towards life, her culture, and her relationships (351). When Lucy first arrives in Villette, French is a completely foreign language. Her discomfort with French also symbolises her discomfort with the city and this new culture. Her closeness to Dr John is often expressed as an affinity and appreciation for the familiar English language and culture. But later in the novel, as her attitudes towards John and Paul shift, the dichotomy between English and French also characterises the dichotomy between her attitudes toward the two male protagonists, and their attitudes towards her.

Ross cites a meaningful example from the end of the novel: when Mme. Beck tries to block Paul from talking to Lucy for the last time, Paul scares the headmistress off in a fit of rage. Their dialogue here resonates with the conversation they had in front of Lucy when she first arrived at the *Pensionnat*, a conversation in French about whether Mme. Beck should accept Lucy as a member of staff. Lucy records the French conversation almost entirely in English, stating that she did not understand any of it at the time, and was given a translation later on. Ross points out that on a narrative level, this suggests that in the beginning Paul and Mme. Beck belong to the same 'linguistic interest group' – they 'share both national and family ties – an intimacy from which Lucy is excluded', and which is demonstrated in a language foreign to Lucy (357). However, when recording the dispute at the end of the novel – still taking place in French – Lucy writes down all of Paul's words in French but all of Mme. Beck's words in English, demonstrating that at this point the community of interest, symbolised by the linguistic community, has already broken down:

> 'Leave her to me; it is a crisis: I will give her a cordial, and it will pass,' said the calm Madame Beck.
>
> […] When M. Paul answered deeply, harshly, and briefly –
>
> 'Laissez-moi!' in the grim sound I felt a music strange, strong, but life-giving.
>
> 'Laissez-moi!' he repeated, his nostrils opening, and his facial muscles all quivering as he spoke.
>
> 'But this will never do,' said Madame, with sternness. More sternly rejoined her kinsman—
>
> 'Sortez d'ici!'
>
> 'I will send for Père Silas: on the spot I will send for him,' she threatened pertinaciously.

> 'Femme!' cried the Professor, not now in his deep tones, but in his highest and most excited key, 'Femme! sortez à l'instant!' (*Villette* 530-1)

Moreover, it implies that the recorder/narrator Lucy is now emotionally more inclined to Paul, and in her narration he is 'granted his natural French voice' (Ross 361). She has learnt by now that Dr John and the English past that he represents do not belong to her. English to her is no longer appropriate as the language representing an identity for resisting the alien and foreign surroundings. As a result, she refers to Mme. Beck's words – French words uttered by a Labassecourian – in the English language, which is now associated more with its rational, restrictive, inhibiting aspect – an aspect that also characterises Mme. Beck (Ross 361).

Through the depiction of Lucy's shift in her attitude towards two cultures, and through a deliberate mismatch between the language uttered and recorded, Brontë challenges the opposition between English and French she originally establishes. To take one step further, her conscious choice of and skilful switch between these two languages on different occasions not only blurs the boundaries of the notion of national and cultural identification, but also overthrows the boundaries between voice and silence.

As Lucy starts her life in Villette, she has to learn French from scratch, and this language barrier seems to prevent her from voicing her thoughts and therefore forces her into silence. Soon after, when Mme. Beck asks Lucy to try out an English lesson, the rebellious local girls are not convinced of their new teacher's authority, and the whole class soon falls into whispers and laughs. At this, Lucy muses: 'Could I but have spoken in my own tongue, I felt as if I might have gained a hearing; for […] nature had given me a voice that could make itself heard, if lifted in excitement or deepened by emotion' (88). Moreover, she could criticise and satirise the students more naturally and fluently when she was in her mother tongue. At the moment, though, all she can do to build up her authority is tear up one vicious girl's composition paper, and lock up another girl into the closet. Obviously, Lucy does not think it the best way to exercise discipline. Yet, as it turns out, her behaviour is very effective in achieving her aim. This seems to suggest that the power of language – whether English or French – is not as decisive as she believes, and that it is substitutable not only by other languages, but even by non-verbal actions. Here, Lucy's action, rather than her language, serves as her 'voice', and verbal silence does not equate with incapacity to communicate.

Brontë's exploration of language and silence goes beyond the protagonist's experience with different cultures, but is also demonstrated in the physical composition of her work. When she was preparing for the publication of *Shirley*, Brontë asked in a letter to her publisher's reader W. S. Williams in 1849: 'Will they print all the French phrases in Italics? I hope not; it makes them look somehow obtrusively conspicuous' (*Letters*, II 255). In 1853, when an old acquaintance of her father's asked if there would be a translation of the French phrases in a new edition of *Villette*, Brontë replied that 'I can't say that [...] this suggestion quite meets my ideas' (*Letters*, III 139). It is clear that the author consciously mixes different languages at the textual level, thus widening the boundaries of both languages, especially English: neither translated nor italicised, the inserted French sentences and paragraphs would seem a natural extension of the English language; that is, it would not appear visually as a highlighted, foreign language. Moreover, considering that Brontë's contemporary middle-class readers would be likely to understand the basic French in her novels, this inclusion of fragmented French as part of English text would be readily intelligible to this readership. Yet, it is exactly during this process, when an individual, bilingual reader reads the text, that the act of 'translation' becomes hidden, individualised, and unconscious, instead of public, textualised, and authorised. This new nature of the translation action is a result of Brontë's conscious design, and deserves to be explored in greater depth.

Helen H. Davis proposes a new term *circumnarration*, to describe what is often noticed in the narrative of *Villette*: an 'active resistance to presenting important narrative information and the further manipulation of replacing direct narration with metaphor, substituted, or diversionary narrative in the place of explicitly refused narration' (199). In other words, Lucy often narrates *around* an event, rather than either directly narrating it or directly ignoring it. Two of the more discussed examples are the substitution of Lucy's own childhood narrative with Polly's at the beginning of the novel, and the use of the metaphors of the sea and the ship to vaguely summarise the loss of her family at a young age. As to the purpose of this evasion, Davis believes that circumnarration allows the narrator to 'narrate possibilities outside of the boundaries of social norms while also conforming to social and narrative expectations sufficiently to create a text that can and will be successfully disseminated' (201-2). Shaw, on the other hand, attributes this suppression of information and frequent occurrence of metaphors as Lucy's effort to prevent 'the exposure of her privacy as an object of knowledge for the "common gaze"' (817). These two views represent opposing directions: one sees the circumnarration as an approach to speak up, and to convey things that are not encouraged to, whereas the other sees it as a means to keep silent, or to hide things from being revealed. But before moving on to discuss the exact purpose of circumnarration, it is necessary to examine the narrative technique *per se*, and especially its relationship with the bilingual context of the novel.

Soon after getting acquainted with Ginevra Fanshawe, Lucy notes that the frivolous young lady ‘always [has] recourse to French, when about to say something specially heartless and perverse’ (99-100). This switch of language could be because she believes that speaking improper things in a foreign language keeps her distanced from what she is saying, and thus she escapes the slight moral judgement that comes with speaking it in a native language with a native speaker. This could also be because she believes that French – a language that is sometimes connected with negative impressions in English culture – conveys her heartlessness more thoroughly than English.[45] Whichever the reason, as it turns out, the substitution of languages does not hinder Lucy, the listener, from understanding the meaning that Ginevra is trying to convey.

This observation of Lucy’s offers a new perspective to the narrative-level substitutions and metaphors that appear from time to time throughout the novel. These substitutions and metaphors undoubtedly block out part of the information about the events being narrated. On the one hand, the information conveyed is enough for the reader to guess some of the facts, and on the other hand, just as Ginevra's choice to substitute French for English conveys an additional layer of information – that she does not want to say heartless things in her mother tongue, or that she especially wants to voice them in another language – so the very act of the narrator choosing to 'bypass' the narrative conveys a message that a direct statement of the facts could not. O'Dea makes a similar argument: he points out that Lucy's evasive narration is at times accompanied by a 'desperately hostile defensive stance, attempting to keep her reader off-balance and disoriented in order to hide her true nature'. Yet Brontë has successfully designed her narrative so that this barrier between the narrator and the reader at times breaks down, allowing the reader to see Lucy for her real self and sympathise with her. The aggressive evasiveness is meaningful *per se*, and forces the reader to see through it immediately, conceiving the real idea within it, and thus achieving sympathetic understanding with the narrator (O' Dea 49-52). Furthermore, through Lucy's observation on Ginevra, the substitution between different languages and that between different narrative forms are established as a set of parallels, forming a complex network within and outside the narrative: when at the end of the story, Lucy the narrator records Mme. Beck's and Paul's argument in English and French respectively (that is, she substitutes the headmistress's original French lines with English), she is conveying an additional message on the narrative level, and it is a message directed at no one else but the reader.

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[45] See Ross 352-3 for his analysis of Mme. Duval in Frances Burney’s *Evelina* as a figure whose impropriety is closely associated with her French identity. Also, Joan C. Beal examines how British held an ambivalent attitude towards French and towards the influence of French on British culture during the eighteenth century, a period marked by hostility between the two nations. While fluency in French was considered ‘an elegant accomplishment’, people who uses French loanwords were sometimes condemned as affected, and the language was associated with ‘coxcombs of both sexes’. See ‘“À la Mode de Paris”: Linguistic Patriotism and Francophobia in 18th-Century Britain’, *The Languages of Nation*, edited by Carol Percy and Mary Catherine Davidson. Multilingual Matters, 2012, pp. 141-54.

Of course, the substitutions used by both Ginevra, within the narrative, and Lucy, the narrator, outside the narrative, are only valid if their listener/reader can understand the 'language' they are substituted with. The reader is able to understand Lucy's metaphorical/allegorical substitutions because both parties share a large context: the story being told, the other details that have been given, and fundamental human emotions. The reason that Lucy is able to understand Ginevra's linguistic substitution is even simpler, since she understands French as well. Therefore, to some degree, circumnarration is both a literal and metaphorical form of translation. More importantly, in both examples, both the speaker and the listener know both the original language and the target language. It is only when the listener knows (or can infer) the original language that s/he can be aware of the gap between the original content and its 'translation' in terms of their meaning. It is only then that the process of translation can convey the additional information it contains. Thus, in this case, the translation process *per se* is simultaneously redundant and significant. Since the listener understands the original language, the speaker's translation seems redundant, but it is this redundancy and the listener's awareness of it that conveys the extra information. During this process, the significance of the act of 'translation' is simultaneously dissolved and intensified, and the boundaries between languages are blurred.

On another occasion, in Chapter 4, one night while Lucy is caring for Miss Marchmont, she hears the sound of a storm. After the storm stops, the old woman returns to her senses, tells Lucy about the tragedy of losing her loved one in the past (as if to foreshadow what would happen to Lucy herself at the end of the novel), and then passes away. Lucy tells the reader that only three times in her life has she heard 'these strange accents in the storm – this restless, hopeless cry' that denotes upcoming tragedies in life and reminds her of the legend of the Banshee (43). Lucy describes this ominous storm-wind as 'a voice […] heard by every inmate, but *translated*, perhaps, *only by one*' (42, my italics). For other people, storms are just natural sounds, but for Lucy they are a language with its own meaning, and it is a language that only she masters in the story. Nevertheless, as she teaches the reader the language through her narration, by the end of the story, when another storm roars and reminds Lucy of the Banshee, the reader, like Lucy at this point in the story, is able to translate the ominous meaning and the unspoken ending of Paul. In this instance, the boundaries between sound, voice, and silence, as well as those between languages are challenged, and they take place on both levels of the narrative.

However, not all the opaque, evasive, allegorical expressions in the novel convey its additional meaning successfully to the listener. During the long vacation in the end of volume I, Lucy in a distressful illness becomes haunted by a nightmare: 'Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved *me* well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated: galled was my inmost spirit with an unutterable sense of despair about the future' (*Villette* 176, original italics). Soon after, at the beginning of volume II, Lucy faints from fever and is rescued by Dr John, who accuses Mme. Beck of treating Lucy harshly and restraining her, and blames Mme. Beck for Lucy's illness. Lucy replies that it is no one else's fault, whereupon John asks her whose fault it is:

> 'Who is in the wrong, then, Lucy?'
>
> 'Me – Dr. John – me; and a great abstraction on whose wide shoulders I like to lay the mountains of blame they were sculptured to bear: me and Fate.'

> '"Me" must take better care in future,' said Dr. John – smiling, I suppose, at my bad grammar. (207)

Here, the pronoun 'me' appears three times in one sentence, clearly for emphasis. Lucy uses informal grammar in an apparent attempt to convey the emotional intensity of her mental struggle, following her previous, haunted experience, but Dr John has not picked up on this additional message conveyed by her intentional violation of the English grammar. Thus, at this moment, the English used by Lucy has in effect become a 'foreign' language for Dr John, and Lucy has no intention to translate it for him. This new English, which breaks through the rules of grammar, also breaks through the boundaries of the narrative, coming from within the narrative to outside it. It is only after this dialogue, in the middle and later parts of the novel, that Lucy's conversations with John and Paul are recorded more than once incorporating strange grammar. For example, later in the museum, Lucy has another conversation about her illness, this time with Paul:

> 'Had I not been ill?' he wished to know: 'he understood I had.'
>
> 'Yes, but I was now quite well.'
>
> 'Where had I spent the vacation?'
>
> 'Chiefly in the Rue Fossette; partly with Madame Bretton.'
>
> 'He had heard that I was left alone in the Rue Fossette; was that so?'
>
> 'Not quite alone: Marie Broc' (the crétin) 'was with me.' (226)

Considering that Brontë had by this time composed three full-length novels and successfully published two of them, this peculiar use of pronouns within the direct speech should not be dismissed as an oversight on the part of the author and/or the editor, but rather should be considered as part of the author's narrative design. The meaning conveyed by the dislocation of pronouns remains to be discussed; it could be used to convey the blurring or flexibility of the narrator's personal boundaries and perspectives, or it could be suggesting that Lucy and Paul's relationship has become more intimate, so that the narrator's voice is moving between her own words and Paul's words in her narration. But most importantly, it conveys the message not to Paul, but to the *reader* that such 'bad grammar' *does* hold additional meaning – by undermining the rules of grammar, i.e. the original boundaries of English, the narrator points out the limitations of the language. In Lucy's conversation with Dr John, it becomes manifest that, when language fails to convey the message that the speaker wants to convey, then at a certain level it is silent. In particular, Lucy's 'silence' at this point does not stem from the intentional suppression of her interlocutor, Dr John. Neither does Dr John refuse to listen to her. Rather, Lucy's failure to convey herself results from two reasons: firstly, because Dr John himself lacks the ability to understand Lucy, for he is confined by the boundaries of 'good grammar'; secondly and more crucially, because Lucy *chooses not to* explain the real meaning to Dr John.

At this point, it is necessary to make some addition and revision to the claim that circumnarration in *Villette* is a translation process. Previously, it has been pointed out that, in the case of Ginevra substituting English with French and of Lucy substituting direct narration of her own experience with others' narration or even metaphors, the feasibility of such substitution and the successful communication of its implication comes from the fact that both parties know both ‘languages’. This prerequisite points to another process that is similar to but essentially different from translation process: the process of encryption and decryption. While the act of translation is often aimed at the public, en/decryption is mostly private, taking place exclusively between certain parties, rejecting others’ surveillance/eavesdropping. When the receiver receives a ciphertext enciphered with a ‘key’, they need that specific key to decipher it back to plaintext. If translation and en/decryption are placed at two opposite ends of a spectrum based on the process’s publicity and/or privacy, the French language used by Ginevra and the metaphorical narrative language used by Lucy the narrator have undoubtedly gone through a process closer to translation, whereas the dialogue between Dr John and Lucy has gone through the process of encryption and (failed) decryption.

When Ginevra switches from English to French in order to say heartless things, hers and Lucy’s shared knowledge of the cultural context – about the French language itself and its image in the English society – serves as the ‘key’ to understand the *implication* of this linguistic switch, which might be called the real ‘ciphertext’. Yet, the ciphertext – the implication here is not that important, for it is more unconscious than conscious on Ginevra’s side, and she does not base her communication with Lucy on the condition that Lucy must understand *why* she switches languages. In addition, the ‘key’ used here is a public key, and any contemporary, bilingual character or reader familiar with the cultural context can infer the implication from Ginevra’s action. Hence, the process is more public than private, and is a literal translation process. In comparison, Lucy’s circumnarration stands in the middle between translation and encryption. Whether it is the metaphorical narration of Lucy’s loss at a young age, or the substitution of her childhood narrative with Polly's, they pose to the reader a cipher text that is not so easy, but still possible to decrypt. Here the ciphertext includes two parts: the unnarrated facts about Lucy's early life, and the reason of her circumnarration. The 'key' to these ciphertexts, then, is the novel itself, with all the hints and details throughout the narrative, accompanied by the reader's impulse to look through and to sympathise. This key is not as public as the previous one, yet it is still accessible to a certain range of readers. Moreover, decryption in the case is still not indispensable: the reader does not have to think through the hidden facts or the reason of circumnarration before they can finish the reading. Decryption will lead to a deeper understanding of the novel, but the novel holds up simply as a reticent woman's life story in a foreign land.

However, although the conversation between Dr John and Lucy with its mention of 'bad grammar' seems relatively insignificant in the whole novel, it is in fact a telling example of the en/decryptive feature of Lucy's circumnarration. Unlike Ginevra's French spoken to Lucy and Lucy's own narration to the reader, what Dr John jokes about as 'bad grammar' is a ciphertext indispensable to his communication with and understanding of Lucy. Yet the 'key' in this case is highly personalised and private: it involves Lucy's very mental struggle, which is unknown to Dr John, or indeed anyone else in the novel. More importantly, while he does not have the 'key' and ignores the encrypted message, Lucy on her side does not make any effort to explain. In other words, she refuses to allow Dr John the key, which means Dr John is ultimately not the intended receiver of this ciphertext. Later, when Lucy uses the 'bad grammar' again to record her and Paul's dialogue, the reader is able to decrypt 'why the narrator narrates in this way', for unlike the characters within the narrative, the reader outside the narrative is accessible to Lucy's inner thoughts, as well as her previous conversation with Dr John – her first attempt at using this personal, circumnarrated language. In spite of Lucy's evasion as a narrator, the mere fact that she provides such a detailed text means that the reader is allowed, even invited to read through – to decipher her.

With the analysis above, it is sufficient to claim that circumnarration in *Villette* is in effect a continuum from translation to en/decryption; based on this knowledge, it is possible to extrapolate the exact purpose of this narrative style. Circumnarration conveys certain pieces of information while simultaneously concealing others, which, to some extent, constitutes a form of narrative silence. Nevertheless, the very act of concealing information generates additional information, which is not accessible to all readers. On one hand, the entire text of the novel functions as the 'key' provided by the narrator to assist the reader in decrypting both the concealed and the additional information. On the other hand, the text as an act of circumnarration inherently serves as a filter, a process of selection for its readers. Decryption requires a certain socio-cultural context and a disposition capable of resonating with the narration. For those who can decrypt it, the meaning and significance of the narrative paradoxically emerges from the narrative silence in *Villette*.

The purpose of encryption is to evade the surveillance and judgment of outsiders – those who are not provided the 'key' – yet its fundamental objective is to transmit information to the selected audience who does have the key. In this chapter, the term "translation" refers simultaneously to both the movement from the original language to the target language and the reversal from the target language back to the original language, just as encryption and decryption are two separate actions performed by two participants. In other words, this process is essentially a bidirectional selection. While Davis and Shaw offer differing interpretations of the function of circumnarration, they both centre their analyses on how it is used to avoid surveillance. The narrator and the author's attempt to bypass surveillance through narrative silence is undoubtedly significant, but greater attention must be paid to how they make this attempt in order to send the ciphertext to the recipient, and to the recipient *per se* in this act of transmission. In her metaphor of the sea and the ship in Chapter 4, Lucy states quite teasingly:

> 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? (39, my italics)

While she assumes a mocking, somewhat provocative tone to dismiss a clichéd reading by the reader, and even hides her teenage loss in a series of metaphors, as if to reject gaze of all kinds, such circumnarration in fact anticipates decryption by the reader.

Ultimately, two seemingly minor episodes within the narrative – Ginevra's switching language for improper words and Dr John's mockery of Lucy's 'bad grammar' – serve as the 'key' to decipher the novel's circumnarration. The relationship between silence and voice is reconsidered; the boundary between inside and outside of the narrative is breached; and a complex interplay emerges between existing languages (French/English), self-invented grammar (personalised use of pronouns), and narrative rhetoric, establishing a parallel yet transmutable system of oppositions. These textual efforts operate under the surveillance acted out in the contemporary society, embodied within the narrative through the city of Villette itself, to ensure that information reaches its intended reader. This encrypted mode of transmission represents the narrator's and author's strategy for navigating the tension between silence and surveillance. Through this process of transmission, both narrator and author are able to establish their identities and to either find or create a space for their existence.

3. Ghosts, Houses, Villette, and *Villette*

The relationship between narrative silence – the translation and en/decryption process found throughout the text of *Villette* – and surveillance is illustrated in another relationship that goes beyond the boundary of the narrative: that is, the relationship between the text of *Villette* itself, and the recurring image of the house within the text. Ahmet Süner argues that in *Villette*, Lucy employs a 'spectral narration': not only is there abundant use of Gothic, spectral elements, but the narrator herself frequently narrates the events around her as if she were a ghost. Although narrating in first person, Lucy seems removed from the world in which she is located, 'as if she were hopelessly shut down or voluntarily took refuge in her own interiority' (315). Süner suggests that this spectral narration helps address the question of national and religious identity. Quoting Lawson and Shakinovsky, he points out that the question of identity in *Villette* is ultimately presented as the compelling phobia 'of not belonging, of having *no* place, of the state of being "placeless"' (Lawson and Shakinovsky 932). This phobia is illustrated by the spectral narration, and the novel is in part a 'quest for a house that could accommodate [Lucy's] ghostly self', through which Lucy moves from one house to another (Süner 316). Süner insightfully notes the importance of the concept of 'house' in the novel, as well as its close connection with the ghost, but these two elements are also closely associated with the action of surveillance. An analysis based on the relationship between these three factors will throw new light on the narrator's and author's solution to the question of identity and fear of displacement.

Shortly after Lucy settles down at the *Pensionnat*, she is informed of the 'vague tale' of the nun, who haunts this building, and whose relationship with this building which is previously a convent is profoundly complex. On one hand, the nun is buried alive beneath its grounds, under the laws of the Church ('for some sin against her vow'). In other words, she was literally and metaphorically condemned to death by the convent as a religious institution (117-8). On the other hand, however, her ghost and the tale surrounding her persist exactly through their connection to the convent itself – that is, her existence is maintained by and fundamentally tied to the building. As discussed in the first section, the ghost of the nun also possesses one aspect that is the spying *surveillante*. The intricate relationship between her and the convent thus mirrors the complex dynamics between surveillance and this architectural space. While houses are supposed to be places of refuge and protection, shielding inhabitants from outside gaze, their very structure in fact enables surveillance rather than obstructing it. In the *Pensionnat*, whether it is Madame Beck, Paul, or Lucy herself, each observe others without being detected, sheltered behind the doors, windows, and walls.

Furthermore, since Lucy is in one sense identified with the ghost of the nun, she shares the ghost's complicated relationship with this house, although in a different way. On one hand, she is subjected to the omnipresent surveillance rooted in it, and her private interiority is constantly being threatened by it, represented by the action of the *pensonniat*'s owner Mme. Beck and her cousin Paul. On the other hand, it is through this house that she is able to establish an identity after leaving her homeland, as it becomes her only place to stay in the first volume. At the beginning of the novel, when Lucy first arrives in Villette, Dr John (whom she did not recognise at the moment) directs her to an English-speaking inn. However, she loses her way, and this act of getting lost ultimately leads her to the *Pensionnat*, the very place she originally sought and the institution that allows her to establish herself as an English teacher in a foreign land.

After spending some time at the school, Lucy subconsciously becomes aware of the danger of relying solely on this house of surveillance, which, despite providing her with a new identity, threatens her identity as well. When she falls ill during the long vacation, tortured by the solitude and the stillness of this emptied school, she fancies that the house is teeming with ghosts: 'the ghostly white beds were turning into spectres – the coronal of each became a death's head, huge and snow-bleached – dead dreams of an elder world and mightier race lay frozen in their wide gaping eyeholes' (177). The bed, this specific type of furniture, connects its inhabitant with the building within which its inhabitant reside, and that Lucy sees the bed as the ghost warns that she is becoming increasingly identified with the nun figure, the original ghost tied to the house. Therefore, she realises that she must '[get] out from under this house-roof, which was crushing as the slab of a tomb'. Only when she leaves this house and searches the city for another shelter might she avoid the fate of being buried alive like the nun, and find clearer hope of being 'loved' and 'owned' (177).

Upon getting lost for the second time and fainting in a storm, Lucy finds herself waking in a house that appears to be a great solution to her displacement – *La Terrasse*, the new home of her old acquaintances, the Brettons. At first sight, this house meets Lucy's expectations and needs: it is full of memory, free from surveillance and welcomes her. However, in this space, Lucy encounters a different kind of risk – that of being displaced. After a gap of seven weeks, Lucy receives another letter from Dr John, who invites her to visit *La Terrasse*. Yet, when she enters her room, she finds in it a spectral figure, namely Paulina 'Polly' Home:

> Repairing to my *own* little sea-green room, there also I found a bright fire, and candles too were lit: a tall waxlight stood on each side the great looking-glass; but between the candles, and before the glass, appeared something dressing itself – an airy, fairy thing – small, slight, white – a winter spirit.

> I declare, for one moment I thought of Graham and his spectral illusions. With distrustful eye I noted the details of this new vision. […] Spectral or not, here truly was nothing frightful, and I advanced. (304-5, my italics)

Just like Lucy, Polly has also been reacquainted to the Brettons only recently, but this ‘intruder’ has already settled herself down in Lucy’s room. Polly’s spectral presence, like the ghostly nun, is both closely associated with Lucy, and therefore a threat to her identity. Polly’s presence in Lucy’s room seems a form of substitution, which resonates with the beginning chapters of *Villette*, when Lucy substitutes her own childhood narration with Polly’s, but with a fundamental distinction. At the beginning of the novel, the substitution of narration is a deliberate case of circumnarration, which is in the control of Lucy the narrator. Here, however, it is Lucy the character who faces the threat of being displaced by Polly, and such displacement is neither of her choosing nor within her control – the next morning, when Lucy is offered the place as Polly’s companion, she tells the reader resolutely that she is ‘no bright lady’s shadow – not Miss de Bassompierre’s’ (330). Lucy is well aware that, while Polly appears in Lucy’s room as a spectral figure, her displacement of Lucy will eventually transfer the spectral, inferior status to the latter, as long as Lucy stays in this room – and by extension, this house. Polly’s appearance is a reminder that, after all, Lucy’s room in *La Terrasse* is a temporary place for her: although both women are allowed to reside in it for the time being, only one of them can really belong to it, by becoming a member of the Bretton family. Ultimately, Lucy cannot find a room of her own in *La Terrasse*, and she must look for another house to fully establish and consolidate her identity.

By the end of the novel, Lucy appears to finally secure an ideal house. Before leaving for overseas, Paul provides her with a house, which is a secret known only to them two, and thus free from surveillance of any acquaintance. Moreover, the house is designed as Lucy's future school, allowing her to assert her own professional identity. Furthermore, as the shipwreck befalls Paul in the finis, this house becomes even safe from Paul's watching as one who has also played the role of Lucy's *surveillant*, although his surveillance is accepted and even welcomed by Lucy. At this point, the house appears absolutely secure for Lucy.

Yet, for Lucy, this security is still in question. The city of Villette is characterised by its pervasive surveillance, which extends beyond the *Pensionnat*. Outside the school, surveillance manifests in Lucy's repeated, uncanny, unexpected encounters with different figures from within or connected to the school, such as Paul, Père Silas, Ginevra Fanshawe, and even the two professor-examiners who frightened Lucy on her first night in the city. In a way, the city is an enlarged version of the *Pensionnat*, or rather, the *Pensionnat* is a synecdoche for the city. As a result, Lucy's new suburban house, which is located in the city after all, remains vulnerable to surveillance. Lucy must add a layer of protection to fortify her private interiority, just as she keeps the letters from Dr John 'triply enclosed' in the bureau (which still proved insufficient for blocking Mme. Beck's surveillance). In other words, she needs to encrypt her life. The product of this encryption is the text of *Villette* itself, written probably within this very house.

The novel's title, *Villette*, holds significant meaning for both the narrator and the author. As an extrapolation of the *Pensionnat*, the city of Villette mirrors its feature and function, simultaneously surveilling Lucy while providing her with a space to define herself. Within the narrative, Lucy's two instances of getting lost in the city both miraculously lead her to precisely the places she needs to be at those moments (the *Pensionnat* and *La Terrasse*), as if the city itself were conscious and organic, guiding her. In a sense, it is only when she gets lost that she finds her way. One could interpret this as yet another process of encryption and decryption. Just as the city of Villette ultimately provides Lucy with a (largely) secure house in which she can continuously establish herself – through teaching – free from surveillance, the text of *Villette* offers the narrator a similarly protected space, in which she can continuously assert her identity, through the act of being read, decrypted, and sympathised by a selectively chosen audience.

From the authorial perspective, this novel differs from Brontë's previous works, which were titled after either the protagonist's name or profession. Instead, this novel is named after the city in which the story unfolds. This choice can be understood as a hint to the novel's reliance on circumnarration, but also as a structural parallel: the text functions as a house, just as the house functions as a city. Just as Lucy finds her way by getting lost, so too can the reader navigate *Villette* through decrypting the encrypted, circumnarrated text, to understand Lucy and help her consolidate her identity. This, ultimately, is how Lucy finds a 'house' to reside while resisting surveillance, which is often symbiotic with the architectural space. The ghostly nun has no say over her own story, and her tale is narrated by others, which permanently binds her existence to the building that originally suppressed her – she cannot extricate herself from it. However, unlike the nun, Lucy successfully escapes the tombslab-like rooftop that threatens to crush her. Near the end of the novel, when she tears apart the nun's costume hidden on her bed – the furniture that connects her to the haunted house of surveillance, the action not only symbolises her imminent escape from the *surveillante*, but is also a sign that she has severed her connection to the silent nun, for she will soon author her own story, through an encrypted text in a safe house.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to offer a reading of Lucy's silence based on its complicated relationship with the omnipresent surveillance in *Villette*, demonstrating how they are intricately intertwined at multiple levels. Rather than forming a simple action-response structure, their relationship is reciprocal and mutually constitutive. Through the spectral figure of the silent nun, who has an aspect of the *surveillante* and is thus closely associated with Mme. Beck, Lucy is bound to the *Pensionnat*, a space that simultaneously constrains and sustains her process of self-formation. Despite Lucy's attempt to distinguish her own surveillance from that of Mme. Beck based on nationality, culture, religion, and morality, her action leads her to become unavoidably absorbed into the system of the *Pensionnat*, and she must leave this place to escape assimilation and achieve an autonomous interiority. Her subsequent search for a secure location – both physical and discursive – unfolds through circumnarration, a narrative strategy of partial silence that operates through acts of public translation and private en/decryption. In crafting an encrypted text addressed to a selectively imagined readership, both narrator and author ultimately carve out a protected space of identity expression that evades the reach of surveillance.

Chapter Five: Listening as Secondary Action in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*

Compared with Charlotte Brontë's other novels, *Shirley* has received less critical acclaim. Critics have remarked on its structural fragmentation and awkwardness in combining various themes: Suzanne Keen identifies several scenes in the novel as 'narrative annexes' that first shift the novel's focus from the submissive Caroline to the strong-minded Shirley and then lead them to a 'retrograde marriage plot' (107), remaking Shirley 'in Caroline's weaker image', which set the novel off balance and result in its decentralisation (118). Helen Taylor notes that the 'Woman Question' in *Shirley* is dealt with 'directly and honestly', but only as a sub-theme, which represents Brontë's 'most interesting failure' from a feminist perspective (84). According to Terry Eagleton, the novel's major concerns are industrial conflict and proletarian plight, yet they are addressed less than appropriately, for the novel's 'major protagonist, the working class, is distinguished primarily by its absence' (47).

Shirley seems like a collage of social issues, touching on multiple topics yet probing into none. Written in the late 1840s and published in 1849, the novel is set in Yorkshire in the year 1811-1812 against the backdrop of Luddite movement, an epitome of the industrial unrest partly resulting from the Napoleonic Wars and the Orders in Council.[46] The novel does not centre around one particular protagonist, and the narrative shifts its focus among Robert Moore, Caroline Helstone, and Shirley Keeldar. Robert Moore is a mill owner who is British by nationality but raised in Antwerp; settling down in Yorkshire, he is determined to modernise his textile business and restore his family fortune by introducing labour-saving machinery, despite fierce local resistance, and the novel opens with his long-awaited new machines being broken by angry, unemployed workers. Robert's economic ambitions bring him into conflict with the working-class community and strain his personal relationships, particularly with Caroline Helstone, his shy and introspective cousin; for, although he harbours feelings for Caroline, he needs a marriage that brings financial benefit, and cannot afford to marry for love or pleasure. Similarly, Caroline's affection for Robert is complicated by social and familial constraints, and when she contemplates working as a governess as a means of escaping the emotional distress caused by her unrequited attachment, her plan is outright dismissed by her uncle Rev. Helstone. In opposition to Caroline, who is confined in her predicament due to financial dependency and a relatively tame disposition, Shirley Keeldar appears later in the novel as an assertive, independent heiress whose wealth and social standing allow her to challenge gender norms and intervene in both political and romantic matters. The novel moves on to depict a midnight riot against Robert and his mill, an incident which is eavesdropped upon by Caroline and Shirley, who, though asked to stay at home for safety, sneak out to the scene of the riot. Working-class discontent culminates in a shooting directed at Robert, and the novel closes with Robert's revolutionised attitude towards his career and his workers, and a dual marriage between him and Caroline, and Shirley and her former tutor Louis Moore.

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[46] In response to a comprehensive economic blockade against Britain from the Continent by Napoleon in 1806, the British government issued an Order in Council in 1807, prohibiting maritime trade with France and ports under French control. The resulting fluctuations in export trade had a profound impact on the domestic economy, leading to widespread bankruptcy and unemployment in the manufacturing districts, see Hilton 211-20.

The Luddite movement, which took place between 1811 and 1816, comprised a series of working-class protests including petitioning, food riots, mass meeting, strikes, and most famously, machine-breaking. Originating in Nottingham in the spring of 1811, the movement spread to several neighbouring areas, with the West Riding of Yorkshire emerging as a key locus of unrest in early 1812, where machine-breakers from textile and other industries believed new machinery created unemployment.[47] Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816, the year in which the Luddite disturbances were largely subsiding; nevertheless, her representation of the movement in *Shirley* rests on a solid factual foundation. She based her research not only from her extensive consultation of back issues of two local papers, the *Leeds Mercury* and the *Leeds Intelligencer*, but also from her residence near the West Riding and thus her access to anecdotal, oral accounts from eyewitnesses, including her father, Rev. Patrick Brontë, and her headmistress, Miss Wooler.[48] The central dramatic incident of the novel, the attack on Robert Moore's mill, is modelled on the 1812 Luddite assault on the mill of William Cartwright in Spen Valley in the West Riding (11th April), which was not far away from Miss Wooler's Roe Head school. The shooting of Robert in Chapter 30 likewise draws on the murder of another mill owner William Horsfall in the West Riding, which took place on 27th April.[49]

Despite these historical underpinnings, *Shirley* is not generally classified as either a historical novel or an industrial novel. Catherine Gallagher excludes it from her discussion of industrial novels because the industrial conflict in it is 'little more than a historical setting and does not exert any strong pressure on the form' (xin1). Kathleen Tillotson puts it into the intermediate category which stands between the 'historical' and the 'contemporary': while its emphasis is not on 'public events or "period" manners', it clearly has a '"historical" colouring absent in *Jane Eyre* […] although [*JE*'s] actual distance in time is not greater' (93). The ambiguity of the novel's genre is further complicated by the introduction of more topics into the narrative, where denominational issues and reinterpretations of the Bible are intertwined with proletarian rebellion and female emancipation.[50] It is difficult to summarise the novel's overarching idea, if there is one. The lack of unity in themes is then reflected in the novel's loose, episodic structure. The eponymous heroine is introduced in chapter 11, at about a third of the way through the narrative, and the novel obviously denies the idea of a central protagonist. That the novel opens with a lengthy chapter on incidental characters (the curates) and interrupts the plot in the later part with Louis Moore's chapter-long notebook monologues (respectively in chapter 29 and 36) are several other examples of the novel's structural inconsistency.

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[47] See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, especially 604-59; Thomis, *The Luddites : Machine-Breaking in Regency England*; Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England, 1780-1840*, 48-56.

[48] Brontë's access to oral accounts of the Cartwright incident is found in Gaskell 83-6; for a more complete account of Brontë's research on the two papers, see Webb 121-61.

[49] A comprehensive account of the Luddite assault on Cartwright's mill was first given by Frank Peel, in his *The Risings of the Luddites, Chartists & Plug-Drawers*; also see Thompson for an account on Cartwright incident (612-6) and for the assassination of Horsfall (623-6).

G. H. Lewes has a good reason to call *Shirley* 'a portfolio of random sketches' (Allott 165). However, this chapter argues that the novel is consistent in structure and narrative on a higher level, for the episodic, sketch-like construction is in itself a conscious attempt at challenging the official, unified discourse represented by that of the ruling class men in the novel. To discuss the power structure in terms of gender and class under the Victorian social framework, *Shirley* resorts not to an explicit and outright depiction of contemporary conditions or historical events, but to a series of marginalised, unofficial voices that are appropriately reflected only in a decentralised narrative. Throughout this narrative, the higher level of consistency is signalled by the activity of ‘listening’ in multiple characters, which links up the seemingly fragmental episodes with the ‘main plot’ (that is, the Luddite assaults targeting at Robert’s mill and himself and their aftermath), and which balances the representation of two main themes, gender and class. Furthermore, the action of listening within the narrative subtly parallels the narrative itself as a marginalised voice made heard by the author, which renders the reader a ‘listener’, and thus creates a particularly intricate structure that is ultimately coherent in echoing itself.

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[50] For some of the discussions on the religious presentation in *Shirley*, see Perkin 389-406 and Ward 603-24.

In *Shirley*, the intertwined themes of gender and class are articulated primarily through three groups of characters: middle-class women, working-class men, and working-class women. This chapter proceeds in three stages. First, in face of the major dramatic event of the novel, the Luddite disturbances, both the excluded middle-class women and the ostensibly central working-class men are forced to stay in a marginalised position. On the one hand, both groups resort to listening for participation, not as a preferred first choice, but as a *secondary action* to witnessing; this shared secondary action then points to a shared secondary status in the generally accepted ‘history’ – the narrative created by ruling-class men and imposed on the rest of the society. On the other hand, they strategically exploit the latent attributes of this subordinate mode of engagement to serve their own interests. Second, the novel presents a hierarchy among different forms of listening, a hierarchy that is, to a large extent, gendered. Finally, the chapter argues that working-class women, as an ‘intermediary group’ partially overlapping with both of the other two groups, hold a position of far-reaching significance in the novel. The seemingly trivial and marginalised voices they offer function as a means of resisting the subordinate status of the listening act in the novel. In the closing scene, the author explicitly invites the reader to listen to these voices, thus granting this narrative about listeners the act of listening that it thematically demands.

1. The Unseen Eavesdropper and The Unheard Listener

As the ‘central dramatic event’ of *Shirley* (Eagleton 47), the Luddite riot at the mill and its aftermath occupy three chapters, from chapter 19 to 21, right at the centre of the 37-chapter-long narrative. On close inspection, the reader may realise that throughout the event the action of ‘listening’ is acted out frequently, and usually under two circumstances: when the agent is forbidden to witness, or when the agent is coerced into silence, leaving room for the other party to speak. These two situations are connected with each other by the agent’s similar passive, reactive status in them, and they demonstrate the intricate power relationships among the three groups of characters and the male ruling class (exemplified in the novel by a federation between capitalists and clergymen). While the first three groups are dominated by the male ruling class and forced to listen, this reaction also helps these groups defend themselves against the latter.

With regard to the riot *per se*, Eagleton contends that it is ‘at once structurally central and curiously empty’, empty because the instigators of the riot – the workers – are never granted a direct description, but only presented from Caroline and Shirley’s perspective in darkness from afar, and their perception of the riot is ‘purely auditory’. By not being seen, the workers’ presence is weakened and their action is ‘displaced into portentously inflated allegory’ (47-8). Similarly, Albert D. Pionke claims that both the riot and the shooting of Robert are ‘doubly distanced’ from the reader since they are ‘focalised through characters […] who neither directly participate in them nor even see them occur; both are only indirectly overheard by the reader, whose ability to appreciate the motives of the Luddites suffers accordingly’ (91). In Sophie Franklin’s words, these moments of ‘political violence’ are ‘displaced onto another medium or mediated by a more “refined” middle-/upper-class spectator or translator’ (44). Yet Eagleton’s view is questioned by Susan Zlotnick, who argues that what he calls ‘the abstraction of action to sound’ is actually the history experienced from a ‘female vantage point’ (285), reflecting how females are denied participation in the history and are only allowed to eavesdrop. It is not the working-class men who are rendered invisible in the narrative, but the female protagonists who are not allowed to witness them. Her interpretation is shared by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who point out that Caroline and Shirley are ‘excluded from the plans for defence of the mill’ and ‘effectively prevented from any form of participation’ (384). Furthermore, Helen Taylor notes that, just like the proletarian men in this scene, the two middle-class women are similarly ‘invisible’, not only to the male ruling class, but also to the working-class men themselves, ‘whose impotence and vulnerability mirror their own’ (86).

Taylor’s remark acutely points out the fact that the two parties of different gender and class experience similar circumstances: in the face of the male ruling class, they are equally powerless; between themselves, the male workers are invisible to the two women, and vice versa – that is to say, the working-class men are likewise denied the status of being a witness to the event, although only partly. On the night of the riot, when the mass of the workers passes by the Rectory, they stop to discuss if they should sneak in to assault Rev. Helstone. Caroline and Shirley cannot see them, for 'the high shrubs of the garden formed a leafy screen' between them and the workers, that is, the physical boundary separating the domestic sphere from the public area prevents them from witnessing anything outside it. Yet the boundary – the screen – also prevents them from being witnessed by the workers, and therefore they 'dared not look over the wall, for fear of being seen' (*Shirley* 319). In this case, failure in witnessing is two-sided. Just as the details of the rioting crowd are unknown to Caroline and Shirley, the specific arrangements in the Rectory are unknown to the workers: they are surprised by the barking dog and hurry off, ignorant of the fact that Rev. Helstone is not even at the Rectory. However, whether they are clergymen such as Rev. Helstone or capitalists like Robert Moore, the ruling-class men are allowed to cross the boundaries as they wish, taking control of both the Rectory and the mill.

Later, when the workers have arrived at the mill and start the riot, their 'view' is likewise restricted: unlike Robert who is 'prepared for [the riot] at every point',[51] the workers have not expected such a strong defence, and hence their 'struggling, rushing, trampling, shouting' in the darkness turns out to be futile – no one is seriously injured on Robert's side, but quite a few are hurt on theirs. While they cannot see Robert and his soldiers clearly, hidden as they are behind the windows, it is the opposite case with Robert, who keeps a 'steady fire' from the mill that indicates a clear view and confident control of the situation (*Shirley* 326-7). That the literal darkness hangs over both parties but hinders only the workers is a reflection of their passivity in such a social event as a proletarian riot, an event where they are supposed to be the protagonists but perform this role due to lack of power and knowledge in the face of the ruling-class men. To be sure, Caroline and Shirley are farther removed from the central event than the working-class men – that is, they witness less than the latter – but the difference in distance is not essential. This is partly because the working-class men are as impotent as them in the face of the male ruling class, and partly because the heroines have actively overcome many obstacles on their midnight journey to approach the riot, shortening the distance to the central event in effect: by crossing over 'leafy screen', 'garden wall', 'quickset hedge' and the 'beck' (*Shirley* 318, 319, 322), they break from their confining domesticity into the public sphere (albeit not entirely). In contrast, although the workers are indeed on the scene themselves, they are not allowed a complete view of the riot scene, both in literal and figurative senses.

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[51] It is worth noting that Robert's preparedness for the riot stems from his earlier experience, for previously in chapter 2 his newly bought machine was smashed by the workers, and thus he has been fully aware of the possible disturbances. This earlier incident is likewise mediated through sound: when the narrative focalises through Robert as he hears a proclamation issued by an unidentified worker ('Ay, ay, divil, all's raight! We've smashed 'em', *Shirley* 31), he is likewise momentarily positioned in a 'secondary status' led by his secondary listening act, unable to ascertain the attacker's true identity. However, unlike the workers or even Caroline and Shirley, his social standing and the resources at his disposal enable him to turn this experience to his advantage, allowing him to respond swiftly and to occupy a stronger position when the riot eventually breaks out.

Since both parties are forbidden to fully witness the central event, they are then forced to listen to it as an alternative engagement. The word 'eavesdrop' means to secretly listen to conversations or events that happen in a private space, or as Ann Gaylin puts it, eavesdropping 'indicates boundaries of public and private areas, and transgressions of the former into the latter' (2). While this is not the case with the characters under discussion here, for the riot at the mill is not strictly a private event taking place in a private area, it does to some extent explain their position in the event. Although the riot – as well as its cause and aftermath – is a social event occurring in the public sphere and known by all, the ruling-class men clearly treat it as a secret, especially in the face of their female family members. Hence, when Caroline and Shirley approach the riot at night covertly, they become in effect two eavesdroppers, listening to a public event made private only to them.

Unlike in Brontë's later novel *Villette*, in which eavesdropping and spying are treated as different but equal forms of gaining information unintended for the agent, in *Shirley*, information acquired from 'eavesdropping' is generally depicted as less convincing than that from 'witnessing'. Covert listening implies the listener is near but not within the space where the conversation or event takes place, separated from that space by a 'leafy screen' or a distance filled with darkness, which naturally results in incomplete, distorted information. When such fragmented information is interpreted and developed into a consistent account due to what Gaylin terms the inevitable 'human craving for meaning' (9), the consistency is likely to be an incomplete, even farfetched one.[52] On the night of the riot, before she and Caroline decide to leave the Rectory for the mill, Shirley could only listen towards the Hollow for hints of the unrest. She is glad the night is so still, for at this moment 'a moaning wind or rushing rain' would baffle her efforts (*Shirley* 317). The aural information she acquires is ambiguous, unstable, vulnerable to disturbances, and therefore likely to lead to misinterpretation. Had she chosen to listen from the Rectory the whole night, she would have ended up just like her governess Mrs Pryor, who could only wonder about the sound of 'firing and confusion', unable to form any satisfactory conclusion from the auditory information she receives (337).

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[52] The inherent tendency of eavesdropping to yield incomplete or even distorted information is also evident in *The Tenant*, as when Graham misconstrues Lawrence's relationship with Helen by overhearing only fragments of their conversation. Yet, as Chapter Two of this thesis has argued, in *The Tenant*, overhearing/eavesdropping is closely bound up with the circulation of gossip, which the author frames as having distinct advantages in sustaining interpersonal relationships and disseminating truth within the community. By contrast, Charlotte Brontë in *Shirley* does not explicitly forge a connection between covert listening and gossip; consequently, in *Shirley*, such acts are represented in a comparatively more negative and disempowered light.

Nevertheless, in certain cases a heard account can be as credible as a witnessed one, when the sounds and words overheard have provided ample, even crucial information for an accurate interpretation of the situation: although Caroline and Shirley could not see the workers outside the Rectory, the noises and dialogue they overhear are enough for them to know the size of the crowd, as well as their disposition and purposes:

> There was a nearer, though a muffled, sound on the road below the churchyard; a measured, beating, approaching sound; a dull tramp of marching feet.
>
> It drew near. Those who listened, by degrees comprehended its extent. […] They could see nothing; the high shrubs of the garden formed a leafy screen between them and the road. To hear, however, was not enough, and this they felt […] when a human voice – though that voice spoke but one word – broke the hush of the night.
>
> 'Halt!'

> A halt followed! The march was arrested. Then came a low conference, of which no word was distinguishable from the dining-room.
>
> ‘We *must* hear this,’ said Shirley. […] They dared not look over the wall, for fear of being seen: they were obliged to crouch behind it: They heard these words […]
>
> Forward [the march] went, – tramp, tramp, – with mustering, manifold, slow-filing tread. They were gone. (*Shirley* 318-20, original italics)

It is undeniable that Caroline and Shirley fully feel the limitation of listening, especially when they realise that the ‘low conference’ of the crowd is indistinguishable from where they stand, and that they must move nearer. Yet, as they find themselves with no alternative but to listen, it turns out that listening alone proves sufficient to depict the full image for them. The ‘measured’ ‘dull tramp of marching feet’ betrays that it is a well-organised crowd of hundreds, and although the heroines have missed the ‘low conference’, the dialogue following it is clear and complete: the workers are armed and know about the Rectory’s layout, and an attack on the reverend is proposed yet immediately abandoned, before the crowd move toward their ‘main object’, Robert and his mill.

Later, dashing to the mill, the two women can barely witness the riot from their location and again can only listen to it, yet the auditory depiction is no mere ‘dramatic slackness’ (Eagleton 48), for the sounds are as vivid and striking as the sight:

> ‘What are they doing now, Shirley? *What is that noise?*’
>
> ‘Hatchets and crowbars against the yard gates: they are forcing them […]’

> ‘Shirley – Shirley, the gates are down! That *crash* was like the felling of great trees. Now they are pouring through.’
>
> […]
>
> *A crash – smash – shiver* – stopped their whispers. A simultaneously hurled volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice lay in shattered and pounded fragments. A *yell* followed this demonstration – a rioters’ yell – a north-of-England – a Yorkshire – a West-Riding – a West-Riding-clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters’ yell.
>
> […]
>
> What was going on now? *It seemed difficult, in the darkness, to distinguish, but something terrible, a still-renewing tumult, was obvious*; fierce attacks, desperate repulses; the mill-yard, the mill itself, was full of battle-movement […] They *heard* the rebel leader cry, ‘To the back, lads!’ They *heard* a voice retort, ‘Come round; we will meet you!’
>
> ‘To the counting-house!’ was the order again.
>
> ‘Welcome! we shall have you there!’ was the response. (324-6, my italics)

Rather than ‘hectic, fragmentary syntax’ that retrieves only as Eagleton suggests ‘a faint sense of the excitement blankly dispelled by the perfunctory notations of the prose’ (48-9), these passages provide a most direct record of a riot at night, conveying its ‘excitement’ to the fullest extent. The seemingly fragmentary syntax reflects the heroines’ immediate perception of the event, where their judgement of old sounds is being constantly updated by new sounds. In fact, these sounds arguably are more informative than the sight of the riot, when all are blinded by darkness. A rioter's yell helps pinpoint his provincial identity, which is gradually yet quickly narrowed down from northern England in general to the West Riding clothing district; the rioters' cries are recorded as specific, direct quotations, and the actions taken and weapons used are faithfully recognised and written down. From the 'noises' alone, Caroline and Shirley are informed of the escalating scene.

Furthermore, the purely auditory experience preserves, even amplifies the emotions reverberating through the scene. When the rioters' declaration of attack is answered by a defiant invitation, the heroines realise at once that the response is given by Robert himself, and that 'the fighting animal' is roused in every one of these men. Both sides are throwing out clipped, heated words, which are simultaneously expressions of emotion and orders of action, carrying information no less than the visual movements and gestures. The narrator apparently understands the power of such auditory information, when s/he claims that hearing riot sounds would surely affect the reader's heart, rousing repulsion and bias: 'You never heard that sound, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears – perhaps for your heart; since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself […] Wrath wakens to the cry of Hate […] It is difficult to be tolerant – difficult to be just – in such moments' (*Shirley* 325). For both fictional characters and readers at this particular moment, the scene heard is more than it can be seen.

For the male workers and middle-class women who must turn to listening as their ‘second best choice’, this action can be seen as ‘secondary’, one that reflects the secondary status of its agent. In the riot, both parties resort to this secondary action because their freedom of action is confined, and access to the mainstream narrative is restrained. Yet as is demonstrated, despite its limitation, listening has proved to be as informative as witnessing under certain circumstances, reversing the agent’s subordination to some extent.

It is noteworthy that, this is not the only factor that enables the forced listeners to fight against their secondary status. While ‘listening’ in this case indicates that both middle-class women and working-class men are denied permission to witness and engage in the central event, such social exclusion in turn leads to a physical invisibility that is not necessarily merely a demonstration of impotence and vulnerability, but can at times serve as a weapon. That both groups are not allowed to witness means that they are simultaneously not witnessed by others. In this sense, Gilbert and Gubar’s comment that Caroline and Shirley are ‘effectively prevented from any form of participation’ needs rectification, for they have successfully participated in the historic event in their own way. Having been excluded from the male history – the riot – Caroline and Shirley approach it exactly by staying silent and invisible. Having sneaked to the vantage point above the mill, Shirley claims her success in acquiring knowledge of the event precisely because she stays outside of it:

> We shall see what transpires with our own eyes. We are here on the spot, and none know it. Instead of amazing the curate, the clothier, and the corn-dealer with a romantic rush on the stage, we stand alone with the friendly night, its

> mute stars, and these whispering trees, whose report our friends will not come to gather. (*Shirley* 324)

Unlike the male-ruling class, Caroline and Shirley are obliged to stay 'off stage', but they are therefore able to hide themselves in the background – their silhouettes in remaining darkness and their voices in the whispering environment. They listen while staying unheard, maintaining a silence that secures their invisibility to the 'curate, the clothier, and the corn-dealer' onstage. Similarly, in the morning after the riot, they cautiously enter the mill and step into a shed where 'they could see without being seen', a sentence that recalls Jane Eyre's choice to stand behind the curtain and wait for Blanche Ingram's party so that she 'could see without being seen' (*JE* 193). This sentence is also resonated years later by Lucy Snowe's choice to withdraw to 'a quiet nook, whence unobserved [she] could observe' in the ballroom at Mme. Beck's fête (*Villette* 156).[53] Shortly after, when the two heroines go back to the Rectory, they do so 'noiselessly' and 'unheard', contrasting with the riot that is full of audible noises (*Shirley* 331). At this moment, the invisibility secured by silence helps them keep secret their stolen participation in a male-dominant history.

Here the silence-invisibility is two-fold: for Caroline and Shirley, it is both a reflection of the forced removal from the official account of a male-dominant public event, and the self-protection covering up their stealthy eavesdropping of that account and event. In other words, it is exactly the silent invisibility that provides the heroines with the access to a scene formerly denied them, and such invisibility – as an inherent feature of eavesdropping – even allows them to rise beyond their forced, secondary action and truly witness the scene, albeit only temporarily. Confined in such a state as they are, they have somehow seized initiative in it and found freedom to cross the physical boundaries and to penetrate the central event from which they have been excluded.

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[53] These three instances of closely parallel phrasing reflect the author's sustained engagement, throughout her literary career, with the condition of women who (choose to) occupy marginal positions. It is important to note, however, that in each scene the character's choice of such a position arises from different premises and serves different purposes, and that the relative advantage or disadvantage implied by this position likewise varies across the three cases. Moreover, the three novels differ in their emphasis on acts such as silence, listening/overhearing/eavesdropping, and covert observation. Thus, while points of convergence exist, each scene must be situated within the broader narrative framework of its respective novel in order to examine the distinct functions that this particular mode of positioning fulfils in its specific context.

In contrast, as to the male workers, their invisibility is closely associated not with silence, but with noises. While Caroline and Shirley must resort to covert listening as they are off stage, the workers who act on the stage are inevitably heard by their targets just as they hear the targets themselves. Moreover, as is illustrated, their view of the situation is limited. In this case, they must simultaneously listen for information from the other party, communicate among themselves with voices and sounds, and ensure that these sounds are uninformative for the other party. Hence, when they call a roll at the end of the riot before dispersing, by answering to figures instead of names, they become figuratively ‘invisible’, which ensures their physical invisibility to Robert and his league, protecting themselves from being charged. As Patricia Johnson points out, Luddism is ‘powerful when it is unseen but felt and heard…as the name Luddism indicates…General or King Ludd, the reputed leader of the movement, did not exist’ (108). When Robert is shot by the mad weaver Michael Hartley, the attacker is again not seen but heard, and his words are a collage of Biblical references, conveying a huge voice not of this particular individual, but of a collective, visionary figure, a folkloric ‘General Ludd’, behind which the workers’ individual identity is hidden. The rioters make noises and give voices that belong to an abstract name, and are thus nameless, a state which originally displays their impotence towards the ruling-class men, but which later assists them in avenging the latter. While social invisibility has been imposed upon both the rioters and the heroines, they find different ways to fight against it with precisely itself.

2. A Hierarchy of Listening: The Gendered Discourse in *Shirley*

The last section has shown how the act of listening or eavesdropping, as an alternative to witnessing, serves as a means for the agent to physically move toward the site where official history is being produced. The secondary status of this action, however, simultaneously reveals the agent's exclusion from and attempted access to that history, which is constructed and controlled by the male ruling class. Yet in *Shirley*, another form of listening is also thoroughly depicted, which is listening as a reaction to the act of speaking. The secondary status of this latter form of listening is the indication of the agent's forced acceptance of the accepted history: one must listen to the speaker, having no choice but to admit the latter's power to speak and the validity of his/her speech. This reactionary listening is often accompanied by the listener's predicament of not being listened to, which points to the forced obedience towards a speaker's power of speech that confines the agent at a position farther removed from the official history than that of an eavesdropper. In *Shirley*, the first type of listening/eavesdropping is acted out by male workers and the two heroines, whereas the second type is shown exclusively in female characters, also including Caroline and Shirley.

While both levels of listening under discussion are secondary actions imposed on the less powerful side in the social structure, they form a subtle hierarchical order within themselves.

After the riot, women in the Rectory and Fieldhead are obliged to accept inaccurate, second-hand information: the servants Fanny and Eliza are told that ‘twenty men were killed’ and that ‘the mill was burnt to the ground’, whereas Shirley’s former governess Mrs Pryor could only guess in fear what the sound of ‘firing and confusion’ has led to (334, 337). The women confined in their houses are provided with either an unreliable narrative or no narrative at all, and they have no choice but to accept it – or the lack of it. Meanwhile, soon after Caroline and Shirley have arrived at Fieldhead, Robert also visits to decline the too-abundant supplies which Shirley has offered him in response to the riot. When first questioned by Shirley about the riot’s outcome, he states that no one was hurt on their side, which is not only a lie (he himself was hurt) but also an incomplete story (341). Caroline soon points out his wound, drawing upon the first-hand information she secretly gained, and Shirley pushes Moore for information on the casualties on the workers’ side.

In this case, all the female characters carry out the action of listening, yet they listen in different ways. While Caroline and Shirley venture to eavesdrop – that is, they have the courage to come so close to the riot scene that they could overhear directly, even partly witness the event – other women remain distanced from the riot, and therefore could only listen to the retelling of it, which renders their action secondary even to the heroines’ listening, which is already an action secondary to witnessing. In contrast, Caroline and Shirley are able to resist the power and validity of Robert’s speech – the unreliable narrative provided by the male-ruling class – for they have gained access to the truth through the initiative they seized in their own ‘secondary action’. In the end, the two heroines successfully create and sustain the ‘mutual mystery’ of their secret midnight excursion to the scene of the riot, a mystery that remains unknown to Robert and everyone else throughout the story (343).

Yet just as the heroines’ power to truly witness is temporary and limited, so is their power to reject the middle-class men’s speaking and speech. Having received visits from Robert and Mr Helstone, Shirley receives her last visitor of the day, the local landowner Mr Yorke. Indignant at Mr Yorke’s criticism of Robert’s act of self-defence and his decision to hire men to suppress the workers by force, Shirley retorts with a tirade beginning with the literal but also figurative complaint ‘Easy for you to talk’ (347). Earnest and powerful as her words are, Mr Yorke dismisses them simply by a ‘smile’ and the seemingly comforting words ‘Come, come now, be cool’, which is an outright denial of the power and validity of Shirley’s words, and by extension, the legitimacy of her use of the speech to exert power. Shirley is clearly aware of the danger in Yorke’s gesture, and bluntly points out the power relationship embodied in ‘listening’ and ‘speaking’ and her impulse to overturn it: ‘Cool! Must I listen coolly to downright nonsense – to dangerous nonsense? No. […] All that cant – excuse me, but I repeat the word – all that *cant* about soldiers and parsons is most offensive in my ears’ (348, original italics).

Even though Shirley has forced her voice out, its power cannot be exerted on Mr Yorke, who is only ‘amused’ by her anger, and who treats her outburst in a leisurely manner for he knows that 'if he wished to avenge himself for her severity, he knew the means lay in his power: a word, he believed, would suffice to tame and silence her'. Moreover, he has the power to *allow* Shirley to speak, and when asked 'What more has thou to say?', Shirley is well aware that she cannot destroy or reverse the power relationship between them, because not only is her voice restrained, but such a restrained voice is not listened to, whereas she must listen to males' words:

> 'Say, Mr. Yorke?' was the answer, the speaker meantime walking fast from wall to wall of the oak-parlour. 'Say? I have a great deal to say, if I could get it out in lucid order, which I never *can* do. […] When I *hear* Messrs. Malone and Donne chatter about the authority of the Church, the dignity and claims of the priesthood, the deference due to them as clergymen; when I *hear* the outbreaks of their small spite against Dissenters; when I *witness* their silly, narrow jealousies and assumptions; when their palaver about forms, and traditions, and superstitions is *sounding in my ear*; when I *behold* their insolent carriage to the poor, their often base servility to the rich, I think the Establishment is indeed in a poor way, and both she and her sons appear in the utmost need of reformation.' (348-9, my italics)

From Shirley's perspective, what the clergymen say and what they do is closely related to each other, indicating that their words are essentially an action in themselves, for these words influence, imply, and direct their and others' actions. The clergymen exert power when they speak, and they speak as they wish, even when their words are deemed as 'silly and narrow' by others, for these judgements cannot weaken them. On the contrary, Shirley has internalised her secondary position in a dialogue, when she unconsciously forbids herself to speak, only because she believes she cannot get her words out 'in lucid order'; although this statement is followed by a speech that is quite organised and clear. Despite her fight against her secondary status, her partial acceptance of it in turn strengthens the other party's control over the situation. At the end of this conversation, even when Mr Yorke is taken aback by his miscalculation of the power of his words on this occasion – when he realises that his suggestion on a probable marriage between Shirley and Robert does not silence Shirley as it should have, but leads her instead to acutely realise Robert's own role in spreading this rumour, he is still able to ignore her demand for the truth and to deny her an answer.

That speaking is the manifestation of power is also exemplified conversely by the case of Mrs Pryor. As a governess, she is treated as a 'tabooed woman' who must 'live alone, and never transgress the invisible but rigid line' established between her and her employers (*Shirley* 355). Although she is evidently knowledgeable, exemplified in her familiarity with English natural history that she shows off in front of Caroline, her work as a governess is not appropriately recognised, and she is held a 'burden and a restraint in society'. She is expected to refrain from 'crossing [the gentlemen's] path' or 'murmuring against God's appointment' – that is, she must stay socially invisible and silent, not allowed to voice herself (355).[54] Even when she does speak about herself years later, it must happen in private during a 'quiet walk', listened to by no one but Caroline, her daughter, who is to some extent a part of and indeed an extension to herself through bloodline. It is worth noting that their walk takes place in the narrow end of the Hollow, a location that is only 'half-a-mile from the mill' but of 'deep solitude' (352). The Hollow is modelled on Spen Valley, and resembles Cartwright's mill also located in Spen Valley, where Robert's mill is located in this ravine. Here a stark contrast is highlighted between the governess and the mill owner: while both characters are at the same place, with the 'mill-stream' running at the bottom of the ravine from where Mrs Pryor walks to where Robert works, spatially connecting the two, they are shown to belong to two opposite worlds. Robert is dealing with the aftermath of the riot, a public event that is both 'visible' and 'noisy', and is expected to be heard and will indeed be heard by the mass along with his own name, whereas Mrs Pryor can only talk about her forced invisibility and silence in invisibility and silence.[55]

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[54] For the general living condition and predicament of governesses in Brontë's time, see Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*.

The governess's counterpart is Shirley's former tutor Louis Moore, yet they live very different lives. At first sight, Louis resembles Mrs Pryor in his living condition, for he also has to confine some of his thoughts to himself, which comprise the two curious notebook narrations in Chapter 29 and 36, where the reader is provided with prolonged monologues on Louis's feelings for Shirley. However, that these written soliloquies are generously laid open before the reader is a reiteration of his relatively dominant position as a speaker. When the narrator invites the reader to 'stoop over his shoulder fearlessly, and read as he scribbles' (*Shirley* 487), it appears that s/he is allowing the reader to eavesdrop the character legitimately, providing the reader with an episode that was previously inaccessible by intruding on the character's privacy. As Keen puts it, since *Shirley* 'takes the form of an erratically omniscient account, rather than a fictional autobiography, and since the narration is not focalized consistently on one character alone, the novel becomes responsible for narrating the inward experience of characters, its heroes – the potential husbands – whom it has hitherto observed from the outside' (111). Yet compared with internal monologues of other major characters – such as Caroline's thoughts on her affection for Robert and her expectation of a forlorn, lonely future – that are finely incorporated into the main narrative, Louis's notebook soliloquies are abrupt and lengthy, which partly accounts for the criticism on the novel's incoherent structure. The fact that the author chooses to interrupt the plot with Louis's thoughts that he 'dare not *think* aloud', to invite the reader to listen to a voice that has been suppressed by the character himself, especially in a somewhat unnatural manner, is reflective of the inequity in power of speech on a narrative level: whereas Mrs Pryor's silenced voice must be made known to the reader through a conversation, a traditional and natural device for revealing her inner thoughts, Louis's voice is conveyed to the reader by abrupt access to his personal notebook, suggesting that its importance exceeds the consistency of the novel's narrative.[56]

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[55] Although *JE* and *Villette* also provide detailed representations of governess life, Mrs Pryor's position is depicted as more powerless. Similarly, while these two novels discuss the power relationships in conversations under a gendered context (for example, conversations between Jane and Rochester, and between Lucy and Paul Emmanuel), Jane and Lucy are shown as finding power in their silence, whereas Shirley's conversation with Mr Yorke as an example demonstrates the author's emphasis on her forced position as a listener and her disempowered speech.

Even on the fictional level – as to the plot itself – Louis turns out to be altogether much more socialised than Mrs Pryor, for he is allowed to participate in conversations among gentlemen and ladies, and is known to and favoured by people across classes, including

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[56] By way of comparison, Helen's diary in *The Tenant* similarly, and somewhat abruptly, takes centre stage in the narrative. As discussed in Chapter 2, this structural move to render a private narrative public is designed precisely to direct the reader's attention to its significance.

William Farren the worker and Mr Hall the vicar (*Shirley* 428). Most importantly, having entered into matrimony with Shirley, he will in the end become a magistrate, stepping into the public sphere, speaking and being listened to as he wishes. While marriage will endow Louis with ‘power and property’ which may lead him to divide Briarfield parish between himself and Robert (605), it only brings about misery to Mrs Pryor, and cannot bring an end to her invisibility or silence.

With the exception of Caroline and Shirley, the ‘hierarchy of listening’ in *Shirley* seems highly gendered, indicating that the irresistible invisibility and silence are imposed fully only upon females.[57] This further hierarchy among the impotent results in and is reflected by a gendered discourse. For her investigation of it, Sibylle Drack distinguishes between two levels of discourses: the level of ‘fictional discourse’ concerns ‘the communication between the characters in the novel’, whereas the level of ‘narrative discourse’ deals with that between the narrator and the (fictive) readers, that is, ‘the narrative strategies used by the narrator to address the readers’ which includes ‘the narrator’s particular ways of representing the […] fictional discourse’ (84). Drack observes that the gendered discourse is first foregrounded in the narrative by having the characters comment on it to make it recognisable (86). This occurs when Mrs Yorke reminds her daughters that ‘It becomes all children, especially girls, to be silent in the presence of their elders’, and is retorted with Jessy’s question ‘Why have we tongues, then?’, followed by that of Rose, ‘And why especially girls, mother?’ (*Shirley* 149-50) Having been foregrounded, the gendered discourse is then shown as challenged and disrupted by Caroline and Shirley on the level of fictional discourse and by the narrator on the level of narrative discourse, where a parallel can be drawn (Drack 85).

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[57] Considering that the two heroines epitomise a courageous yet failed feminist challenge to the gendered value system (illustrated most tellingly in the contrast between their riot journey and final retrogradation to marriage), it is reasonable that they listen in both ways – sometimes defiantly, at other times powerlessly.

In terms of fictional discourse, both Caroline and Shirley use a social discourse that is flexible enough to contest the male-dominant, upper- and middle-class discourse and the rigid social expectations behind it (Drack 90). While Mrs Pryor feels as if 'a great gulf lay between her caste and [that of William Farren]', Caroline can accommodate easily to his working-class discourse and develop a sincere friendship with him (*Shirley* 415). Susan Smith remarks that Caroline is a bidialectal character who understands well that dialect and accent are 'social markers', and in a conversation, the heroine frequently adopts her counterpart's vocabulary to 'minimise the difference' between them (642). For instance, when Caroline enquires with Martin Yorke about Robert's wound and asks him to do her a favour, she opens the conversation carefully with 'Are your father and mother well?' following which the narrator parenthetically comments that 'it was lucky she did not say *papa* and *mamma*: that would have undone all' (*Shirley* 533). Here, not only is Caroline using a discourse that adjusts itself according to the person she is talking to and thus creating a bond between them on the level of fictional discourse, but the narrator is also highlighting it on the level of narrative discourse, drawing the reader's attention to Caroline's intention and ability to speak across classes.[58] That is, through the novel itself, the narrator is purposefully making her heroines listened to.

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[58] A counterexample to the adjustment of language according to the interlocutor's social identity or class occurs in *Wuthering Heights*, when Isabella asks Joseph if there is a 'parlour' where she might rest – a choice of word that provokes his derision (*WH* 141).

In a similar yet slightly different manner, Shirley proves to be an androgynous figure who transgresses discursive boundaries between not only classes, but also genders. As one who assumes a male name (originally prepared for a son) and the power and position normally belonging to an heir, she talks on subjects with which Joe Scott, Robert's foreman at the mill, thinks a woman '[has] no right to meddle' (*Shirley* 310), and speaks with the milk-fetchers with a 'frank, tranquil ease', whereas she is 'cooler amongst her equals, and rather proud to those above her' (316). Although her words to Mr Yorke on public issues are denied power, they are spoken openly in the first place, which is hardly possible for other middle-class women in the novel. Instead of being admitted to engage in the middle-class, masculine discourse, Shirley 'resists the clear gender and class expectations of a Victorian society' (Drack 91).

Drack contends that the narrator is, like Shirley, of no gendered identity, which is a crucial characteristic that contributes to the author's illustration of and challenge to a gendered discourse at the level of narrative discourse. Gisela Argyle in her genre-based reading of *Shirley* posits that three narrative modes are presented in the novel – the comedy of manners, the historical romance, and the psychological romance – which belong to three distinct narrators (743). Drawing on her categorisation, Drack refutes Argyles' theory of multiple narrators, arguing that the three narrative modes are actually different aspects of one consistent narrative by one consistent narrator, whose relation to the reader oscillates between detached (masculine), informative (neutral), and intimately engaged (feminine). By assuming a non-gendered identity, the narrator 'mocks and *criticises* a dominant social discourse […]

problematises and asks for critical distance […] and s/he *offers suggestions for change* by introducing a socially integrating discourse' (95, italics in original). Following this line of thought, Louis's notebook monologues can be further understood through a dual lens. On the one hand, these two episodes, revealing the hero's inner world (and particularly his subtle power/love relationship with Shirley) are arranged in such an abrupt manner that they emphasise the incontrovertible discursive power of ruling-class men. The idea conveyed is that the monologues *must* be heard, which foregrounds the gendered discourse. On the other hand, building upon this emphasis, the very conspicuousness of the soliloquies' suddenness deliberately designed by the author becomes a self-reflexive gesture, turning the representation itself into a mockery of the dominant discourse behind them, and inviting the reader to question *why* they must be heard.

3. Working-Class Women: The Voice Uttered Aloud

If the double-layered gendered discourse is constructed through the representation and reflection of the hierarchical gap between two distinct levels of listening as a secondary action, to take one step further, it will be complicated by the involvement of class issues: within this discourse, women from different classes are treated differently, both on the fictional level and narrative level. In *Shirley*, both middle-class women and working-class women are depicted, and the latter is further divided into two sub-groups, factory girls and domestic female workers. While the novel depicts how middle-class women such as Caroline and Shirley have no choice but to listen and not be listened to, working-class women, or more specifically mill girls, seem to have their silence and invisibility shown in a more complete, fundamental manner – they are never represented directly, but only mentioned twice throughout the narrative. Yet, the absence of female factory workers in the narrative is compensated by the presence, and more importantly, the voice of domestic female workers which bracket the narrative. This section argues that the voice of these working-class women carries a representative kind of power: it speaks not only for themselves, but also for the absent female factory workers and, at times, for the repressed voices of their middle-class mistresses. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is conspicuously linked with them through the abrupt use of the first-person plural pronoun, emphasising the collective quality of their voice. At the end, through her folkloric discourse, the narrator's housekeeper directly refuses the dominant narrative of the male ruling class, offering a marginalised alternative. Above all, through this narrative bracketing, the author compels the reader to *listen to* the female voice in the text. Alongside the repeated portrayal of listening as a secondary act throughout the novel, this structure successfully empowers the marginalised female voice, enabling those who were once only listeners to become the ones listened to.

References to mill girls first appear when Robert's sister Hortense complains about their servant Sarah, to which Robert replies by offering an alternative:

> If it would yield her any satisfaction, she should have her choice of an attendant amongst all the girls in his mill: only he feared they would scarcely suit her, as they were most of them, he was informed, completely ignorant of

> household work; and pert and self-willed as Sarah was, she was, perhaps, no worse than the majority of the women of her class. (84)

Later, Robert on one occasion mistakes his mill girls for Caroline, and finds himself standing between 'two buxom lasses in pinafores' (241). While the novel centres on the conflict sparked by new modes of production in the mill, the reader is never allowed to enter this location, and the female workers working in the mill are never seen or heard. Johnson observes that, despite the importance of female workers in the Industrial Revolution, their absence in industrial and social-condition novels of the time was a common phenomenon, for their existence *per se* – strong and independent women engaged in work outside the domestic sphere, earning money so that they are in less need of a 'male breadwinner' – was a destructive challenge to the Victorian domestic ideology of the 'feminine' (7).

The absence of mill girls in *Shirley* seems to manifest Brontë's compliance with the middle-class ideology that advocates, even demands women to stay within or return to the domestic sphere, and that deprives women of their voice, imposing upon them an unquestionable masculine history. Yet she also transgresses such ideology by laying extra emphasis on the representation of domestic female workers in place of the factory girls, and by making domestic female workers voice for middle-class women. The two mentions in passing of mill girls associate them first with female servants and then with middle-class women, whereas female servants interact frequently with their middle-class lady masters, and are at times confrontational but more often supportive. The three parties are therefore interrelated, and in contrast to middle-class women whose voices are repressed and mill girls whose voices are essentially non-existent, domestic female workers in *Shirley* – including not only servants but also landladies who do the housework on their own – voice their thoughts and feelings quite frequently. In effect, their voices compensate for the loss of discursive power of their mistresses and factory counterparts.

The loss of discursive power has led not only to silence and accordingly social invisibility of middle-class women and mill girls, but also to the ignorance of the nature of their labour. Here the term 'labour' refers to both physical and mental work, so long as it engages paid employment. As a governess to multiple pupils, Mrs Pryor must have contributed greatly to the Hardmans, yet her labour is not recognised by the family, and employed as she is, she is held a 'burden in society', and her plight is representative of this large group of governesses during nineteenth-century Britain. Her daughter Caroline, on the other hand, is denied the opportunity to become a governess by Mr Helstone because of the humble nature of this position, which means that she has barely any other professional opportunity outside her home. This leads her to 'wish nature had made her a boy instead of a girl, that she might . . . be [Robert's] clerk, and sit with him in the counting-house, instead of sitting with Hortense in the parlour' (75). Hence, the only way of labour left for her is sewing, and yet to quote Peter Capuano, needlework in *Shirley* appears as a 'bitter, dispiriting, and deeply depressing activity that is representative of a more generalized feminine futility' (235), since the articles sewed are 'quite useless', but which the middle-class men are obligated to buy at 'four or five hundred per cent above cost price' (*Shirley* 109). Talia Schaffer sees such violations of normal business practice as a confirmation that ‘women were merely “playing”, in a separate realm not bound by the laws of trade’ (12). Yet women are less unbound by such laws than exiled from them: unlike the hand-work of the weavers in the mills, the needlework inside the houses is not recognised for its value, and is therefore not admitted into the public, commercial world. Contrary to Caroline, Shirley is ‘lax of her needle’ and ‘never sews’, and even when she does sit down to her needlework, she is frequently interrupted by affairs concerning daily operations of her estate, such as ‘hearing the conclusion of the whole agricultural matter on the spot’ (*Shirley* 365); unlike Caroline, Shirley is occupied with labour that is essential and recognised, which is due to her position – a position normally reserved for a man.

Whereas Zlotnick states that Brontë ‘links middle-class women to working-class men through their common affliction: unemployment’ (288), it can be seen that the value of middle-class women’s labour is not admitted, whether they have an occupation or not, and their affliction is not necessarily connected to unemployment. Mrs Pryor is employed by an aristocratic household, and yet she lives an isolated, constrained, sickness-inducing life like the unemployed Caroline.

Nevertheless, in terms of labour being denied value, the working-class men are faced with a similar predicament, and this is a link that disrupts the previously established gendered discourse. With the introduction of machines, working-class men become unemployed – that is to say, the value of their labour is not recognised anymore, and the weavers’ handwork now enjoys the same state as middle-class women’s needlework, that is, a state of no value. On the narrative level, this is indicated by the absence of direct description of mill work. In this sense, both parties and their labour have become socially invisible, and their voice not listened to.

If the labour of middle-class women is rendered invisible because these women themselves have first been rendered invisible by the male ruling class – denied both a witness to and a voice in the dominant social discourse – then, in the case of working-class men, the causal order is reversed: they themselves become socially invisible to the male ruling class after their labour has been rendered unrecognised due to the new modes of production. Hence, while both parties and their labour are more or less excluded from the dominant social discourse, the causal relations behind each are different. On a deeper level, what links them is not any objective situation such as unemployment, but the more subjective feelings induced by similar silence and invisibility, no matter the cause. To quote Argyle, Michael Hartley – the mad weaver and shooter of Robert – is 'associated, through his aspiration, frustration, and response, with Caroline and Shirley' (749). Caroline and Shirley contest the invisibility imposed upon them through challenging and disrupting the dominant social discourse through non-violent eavesdropping and speech, whereas Hartley – and the rioters in general – fights against it with physical violence. Yet compared with these two groups, the working-class women in the mills are confined in a more invisible position, whose predicament is the combination of that of middle-class women and working-class men respectively, and this double devaluation is represented by the group's total absence in the narrative. As such, the discussion of a cross-gender bond is shifted to a cross-class one within the female community, and is thus incorporated back into a gendered discourse. Accordingly, the author's examination of the relationship between labour and discursive power is now embodied in her illustration of domestic female workers.

In the novel, domestic female workers comment on their own labour as well as the world around them. On the one hand, they are shown working and complaining about their work, a feeling presumably shared by female industrial workers: the novel opens with a scene where the curates dine at one another's lodgings as usual, and where their landladies are annoyed at this habit, for 'it is just for naught else but to give folk trouble' (*Shirley* 7). Mrs Gale – Mr Donne's landlady – has a 'spark of the hot kitchen fire' in her eyes as she waits on the curates, and when she receives the rude demand to cut the bread, she feels inclined to 'cut the parson also'. In a similar manner, when unexpected visitors drop by the Helstone Rectory, Eliza the cook complains to Caroline: 'What a lot on 'em! And I put off the baking to-day because I thought there would be bread plenty to fit while morning: we shall never have enow […] I wish these fine folk would stay at home till they're asked: and I want to finish trimming my hat' (109). The narrator clearly sympathises with their travail, and therefore when s/he introduces the oak-panelled parlour in Fieldhead s/he mentions its grandeur in the same breath with the tedious work of cleaning it:

> *Very handsome*, reader, these shining brown panels are, very mellow in colouring and tasteful in effect, but – if you know what a 'Spring-clean' is – *very execrable and inhuman*. Whoever, having the bowels of humanity, has seen servants scrubbing at these polished wooden walls with bees-waxed cloths on a warm May day, must allow that they are *'intolerable and not to be*

> *endured;'* and I cannot but secretly applaud the benevolent barbarian who had painted another and larger apartment of Fieldhead [...] of a delicate pinky white; thereby earning for himself the character of a Hun, but mightily enhancing the cheerfulness of that portion of his abode, and *saving future housemaids a world of toil*. (*Shirley* 188, my italics)

By paralleling the very handsome decoration with the very inhuman cleaning work and thus creating a stark contrast, the narrator draws attention to the commonly ignored group of female servants and their labour. In such a way, s/he helps to establish the discursive power of female servants on two levels: first by conveying their largely unrecognised voices to the reader, elevating them to the status of a speaker, and then by rebelliously supporting such voices aloud, which is in itself a mild transgression of the dominant ideology, indicated by the word 'secretly' – s/he is purposefully making a claim that should not be made.

On the other hand, female servants observe and discuss the lives of those around them, creating a submerged narrative that has an intricate relationship with the repressed voices of their lady masters. To quote Johnson, female servants are 'the chroniclers of the history of women' (112). When introducing the history of Mary Cave, the late Mrs Helstone, the narrator not only directly depicts Rev. Helstone's indifference to his wife, but also foregrounds a perspective from the female servants, thereby emphasising a psychological bond between women across class boundaries:

> [Rev. Helstone's] dry-eyed and sober mourning scandalised an old housekeeper, and likewise a female attendant, *who* had waited upon Mrs

> Helstone in her sickness; and who, perhaps, had had opportunities of learning more of the deceased lady's nature, of her capacity for feeling and loving, than her husband knew. (*Shirley* 51)

As for Caroline, rumours among old servants attest to her own memory of an ill-tempered, unkind father, and she could only depend on the words of an old servant for an impression of the mother who deserted her (99, 180).

More importantly, female servants do more than pass on information about domestic history which is otherwise ignored and unaddressed. When Caroline finds herself lovelorn and is forbidden by Rev. Helstone to visit Robert again, she becomes so dejected that her depression is perceived by her servant and companion Fanny, who suggests she take a walk and visit Miss Mann and Miss Ainley for company. Not only does Fanny advise Caroline to put down the sewing which the heroine has become tired of – to break free temporarily from the valueless labour imposed upon middle-class women – but she also retorts the gentlemen's dismissive opinion of the 'old maids', claiming that 'gentlemen think only of ladies' looks' (171). That female servants are often supportive of their mistresses is also demonstrated by Shirley's decision to entrust the arrangements after her death to Mrs Gill, when she fears she would die from the bite of a rabid dog, for the two are emotionally intimate, and Shirley trusts 'both her integrity, her courage, and her affection' (479).

The cross-class connection between domestic female workers and middle-class women proves to be one that starts in an employment relationship but often develops into a quasi-friendship. Through this connection, domestic female workers build up an oral narrative that simultaneously records the unheard history of middle-class women and voice their repressed defiance against the Victorian middle-class domestic ideology. This two-fold function is finely illustrated in the novel's concluding scene. Having narrated the 'final fates' of major characters, the narrator closes the narrative with a conversation between him/herself and his/her housekeeper, Martha, which takes place decades after the main plot and looks back at it. As regards the two couples, in contrast to an official history that would probably focus on the brothers who are magistrate and capitalist, the housekeeper clearly finds the two ladies more memorable than their husbands. Martha especially respects Shirley, for she believes that 'there is no such ladies now-a-days', a comment that looks to mythification of the figure. The sense of mythification of female characters and even female history in general is reiterated when Martha answers the narrator's enquiry about the Hollow. Instead of giving an account of the mill, she looks further back, recounting a folkloric story:

> 'I can tell, one summer-evening, fifty years syne, my mother coming running in just at the edge of dark, almost fleyed out of her wits, saying, she had seen a fairish (fairy) in Fieldhead Hollow; and that was the last fairish that ever was seen on this country side (though they've been heard within these forty years).' (607)

Martha skips the official, industrial narrative about the mill, the development of local textile industry, the business or politics, that would undoubtedly ignore the participation of female factory workers – as has been manifested by the novel-narrative itself – and replaces it with one that is marginalised, incredible, and with a heavier sense of historical continuity. Yet the narrative she offers is very likely the mythologised distortion of real female rebellion: the sight of a fairy in the Hollow on a summer evening strangely echoes the time when our heroines ran towards the mill on the summer night of the riot, and the appearance of fairies 'heard within these forty years' is a direct reference to their night journey – this narrative resonance creates an ambiguous space that connects the unheard, repressed defiance to a folklore tradition that must have haunted this place for a much longer period of time than forty or fifty years. As such, it seems that, as long as the fairies roam the land, there has been and will always be female rebellion. And when Martha passes this narrative on to the narrator, she also passes on the hidden record of female voices striving to be heard; even if fairies are no longer witnessed and the place has been altered, the *story* of them will be told no matter what, as well as the female voices embedded in the story. Interestingly, in the opening chapter, the narrator warns the reader not to anticipate 'anything like a romance' or 'sentiment, and poetry, and reverie', but to prepare for 'something real, cool, and solid' (5). However, it is also the narrator who presents the reader with this sentimental, folkloric ending, which seems to confirm the validity and reality of this marginalised narrative.

This ending, along with the landladies' complaint about the curates' frequent meetings in the opening chapter, constructs a narrative frame in which repressed female voices are made audible through domestic female workers. In fact, the landladies' complaint 'it is just for naught else but to give folk trouble' is the first direct quotation of the narrative, before the three curates are given their voices. Within this framework, the author weaves a narrative that is hardly admitted but yet parallels with and complements the 'official masculine historicity', to quote Leslie Rabine's term (qtd. in Johnson 106). Through this process, the silenced listener elevates to the state of a speaker, and the reader is turned into a listener. Although the novel is formally a written text, compared with *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* which are designed as autobiographies – meaning that their inherent quality as self-written accounts are manifest from the beginning – the narrative of *Shirley* highlights its potential nature as an oral account of multiple voices. While the narrator refers to him/herself as 'I' throughout the narrative, only in the first paragraph of the novel does s/he announces: 'not of late years are we about to *speak*; we are going back to the beginning of this century […]; we will evade the noon, forget it in siesta, pass the mid-day in slumber, and dream of dawn' (5, my italics). In the ending, immediately following Martha's folkloric account in direct quotation, the narrator claims that 'the story is told', as if equalling Martha's partial, folkloric, marginalised story-telling with the entire story, ensuring that her account is being listened to. Therefore, the narrative emphasises the 'listener' aspect of its reader. Such reversal in roles creates a sense of self-mirroring coherence based on the listener-listened relationship that starts from within the narrative but ultimately goes beyond it.

4. Conclusion

Although Brontë devoted great effort to researching contemporary records of the Luddite riots from local papers, and in spite of anecdotal accounts of the assault on Cartwright's mill, there is relatively little direct depiction of working-class men in *Shirley* – with only William Farren, Michael Hartley, and (doubtfully) Moses Barraclough given narrative presence. This results in what may appear to be an imbalance between the themes of gender and class, with the former receiving more narrative space than the latter. Herbert Rosengarten holds that 'a detailed description of the Luddites and their methods would not have suited [Brontë's] purpose, since her primary interest was the course of the personal relationships affected by the disturbances' (596). Since these personal relationships centre on Caroline and Shirley, two middle- and upper-class women, it would be difficult to provide a panorama of working-class life from their perspective, in spite of the third-person narrator.[59]

Nevertheless, this chapter has demonstrated that, class concerns are by no means absent; rather, they are redirected towards working-class women. Through the absence of mill girls and the subtle but continuous presence of female domestic workers, issues of class are explored alongside gender. Crucially, the narrative does not merely juxtapose these two concerns, but mediates them through a sustained interest in the dynamics of listening. The long-ignored voices of working-class women, framed in both literal dialogue and narratorial alignment, emerge within a submerged narrative that is episodic on the surface, yet unified in its consistent depiction of listening as both theme and structure.

In this sense, the interplay between gender and class ultimately returns to the ear: listening becomes the shared ground on which the powerless, whether female or working-class, negotiate visibility. This chapter has explored how *Shirley* constructs a coherent yet decentralised narrative structure by embedding the act of listening within its representation of marginalised social groups. Across three successive sections, it has demonstrated that listening functions not merely as a thematic concern, but as a structural device that links together fragmented voices across social and gendered divides. In this acoustic space, working-class women acquire a representative voice that does not overpower but connects, resists, and reverses. In unifying these layers, the chapter has argued that *Shirley* turns the marginalised act of listening into a vehicle for narrative cohesion, whereby the decentralised structure itself becomes an acoustic architecture for suppressed voices to be listened to.

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[59] Another reason for the relative absence of direct proletarian description may be that Brontë was wary of the Chartist movement during the composition of *Shirley*, which was 'taking place literally before her eyes' for she lived at the heart of Chartist movement in Bradford, Yorkshire (Barker 555). As a strong Tory, sympathetic with the working-class as she was, she expressed her worries in March 1848 that 'spasms, cramps and frenzy-fits now contorting the Continent and threatening Ireland' might contaminate England, and thus might have exaggerated the close connection between the Luddite rioters and physical violence, which led her to look slightly away from them (*LCB*, ii, 48).

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how the Brontë sisters construct a unique sonic architecture across their novels, an architecture in which sound, silence, and listening are not incidental motifs, but central structuring principles that carry narrative, epistemological, and ethical weight. While each novel engages with sound in its own distinct way, together they form a composite vision of how sound and voice are made audible or suppressed, how silence can both constrain and empower, and how the act of listening operates as both a narrative technique and a political gesture.

Beginning with *Wuthering Heights*, it has shown how the novel's acoustic fabric unsettles conventional narrative coherence, yet ultimately achieves a heterogeneous harmony in which all sounds – natural, human, spectral – are part of an interconnected system. In The *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the thesis traced how Anne Brontë deploys both spoken and written language to resist imposed silence, dissolving the presumed binary between orality and textuality to foster intersubjective connection. *Jane Eyre* was examined through its heroine's evolving relationship with silence, which shift from enforced muteness to self-assertive quietude, culminating in a textual self-narration that affirms both interiority and agency. In *Villette*, the focus turned to the dynamic between silence and surveillance, showing how Lucy's circumnarrative silence and encrypted storytelling creates a textual refuge – a space both within and beyond the story – where identity may be asserted without external intrusion. Finally, in *Shirley*, the thesis argued that the author constructs a decentralised narrative of multiple voices, in which listening is examined as a secondary act that exposes entrenched hierarchies of gender and class, and is repositioned as an act of subtle but potent resistance, especially through readerly engagement with the text.

After a detailed analysis of the novels of the Brontë sisters, my conclusion returns to a key question raised in the Introduction: why do all three sisters display a sustained attention to sound phenomena, while the soundscapes they depict seem to lack distinct temporal markers, instead resembling a more general, all-encompassing but unfocused soundscape?

I argue that the all-encompassing quality is precisely what characterises the soundscapes constructed by the three sisters. This broad inclusivity results, fundamentally, from the way their individually crafted soundscapes complement one another. From the chapter overview, it becomes clear that while all three sisters demonstrate a pronounced attentiveness to various aspects of sound, they also exhibit different emphases. Even when engaging with the same theme such as silence, their understandings and deployments of it differ, not only across authors but even within the works of a single author at different stages. These variations allow the three sisters' works to form a mutually complementary relationship, collectively constructing a wide-ranging sonic architecture.

Such complementarity, in turn, arises from unconscious tendencies shaped by the parallel trajectories of their lives. It cannot be overlooked that the three sisters were born into the same family at Haworth. They heard the same stories as children, such as the attack on Mr. Cartwright's mill, a key episode in the Yorkshire Luddite movement. They read the same Romantic writers, most notably Byron (*Edinburgh Companion* 164-5, *Cambridge Companion* 53-7), whose influence is variously reflected in the characters of Heathcliff, Rochester, and Arthur Huntingdon. They attended the same schools: first the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, then Miss Wooler's Roe Head School, and Charlotte's depiction of *Jane Eyre*'s Lowood draws heavily on the suffering they experienced at Cowan Bridge (Barker 120-41). They all worked as schoolteachers or governesses, a formative experience that finds its way into Anne's and Charlotte's novels. They co-created fantasy worlds, from the shared Glass Town saga with Branwell, to Emily and Anne's Gondal (Barker 151-69). They even traveled abroad together for study and work (Emily and Charlotte's stay at Heger Pensionnat in Brussels, Barker 377-95).

It is undeniable that, their education, political awareness, and worldview must have overlapped with those of other contemporary writers, for they absorbed similar intellectual trends through publications such as *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine*. Yet the interrelationship among the sisters and their mutual influence on each other were uniquely close. As Glen points out at the beginning of the 'Introduction' to *Cambridge Companion*, from the moment they published poems together under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, they have been perceived as a group: 'even as they have drawn distinctions between them, common reader and academic critic alike have been sharply or confusedly aware of those shared characteristics which set their writings apart from other writings of their time' (2).

As the plots and characters in their respective novels suggest, in their lives, the sisters developed different areas of interest out of shared experiences, shaped by differences in temperament or innate aesthetic preference. One might even speculate that such divergences in interest and taste arose unconsciously from their years of living closely together, as part of a process of self-definition aimed at distinguishing themselves from one another. Yet their thematic concerns remain grounded in a common foundation. This is particularly evident in the sonic dimensions of their fiction, which has been the focus of this present thesis: while each sister focuses on different facets and meanings of sound, silence, and listening, they nonetheless share a common worldview shaped by auditory perception and response. Their respective portrayals of the sonic world, interconnected yet stylistically distinct, can be likened to three divergent flowers blooming from the same root system. It is perhaps this inward-facing network of connection that renders their sonic representations mutually complementary, while simultaneously setting them apart from the broader cultural soundscape of their time.

Broadly speaking, this study has sought to address a small yet noticeable gap shared by both literary sound studies and Brontë scholarship. Through the analyses presented above, it takes a first step toward filling that gap. Since the central objective has been to pinpoint the Brontë sisters' shared attention to sound and identify an over-arching, all-encompassing sonic architecture that connects their works, the discussion has focused on foundational concepts such as sound, silence, and listening. Building on this foundation, future research may investigate more specific sonic content in the novels – for instance, themes related to music and theatrical representation, or the interplay between sound and the sisters' respective religious views. While a few scattered treatments can be found in existing criticism, they have not yet coalesced into a sustained line of scholarly inquiry, highlighting the need for more systematic research in this area. In addition, this study can help promote a broader engagement with pre-mid-nineteenth-century literature, particularly the novel, within the field of literary sound studies. By foregrounding the Brontës' sustained attention to sonic texture, it encourages further inquiry into other authors of the same period, such as Dickens, Gaskell, or Trollope, as well as earlier novelists of the Romantic era, including Walter Scott and Mary Shelley, whose works have so far received limited attention from scholars of literary sound studies.

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