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Novel Books: The Power of Metafiction in Female Victorian Writing

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Introduction

“I am simply a 'book drunkard.' Books have the same irresistible temptation for me that liquor has for its devotee. I cannot withstand them,” said L.M. Montgomery, author of *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). Most bookworms can name their gateway drug, the one piece of literature that started them on an irreversible spiral downward of staying at the library until closing time and spending more money on books than food. My fascination with Victorian literature began in elementary school when I bought *Anne of Green Gables*, which takes place on Prince Edward Island during the late Victorian period. The book drew me in with a redhead on the cover and a free locket with purchase, but I quickly discovered Anne and I were “kindred spirits.” As Anne’s story ended, I went searching for my next fix. I stumbled upon the Brontë sisters and subsequently suffered from nightmares about *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha for about a year.

Just as books shaped my life, they shape those of novelists, who had to develop a love of reading to develop a love of writing. The presence of books and reading within a novel serve as touchstones, or connections for authors to their own work. To become a published author is to have a physical manifestation of one’s thoughts. It is also most writers’ ultimate goal. Thus, the use of books and reading in a novel remind the reader that she is in fact reading a book and has not actually entered a different world. Furthermore, as most writers begin as readers, books are typically familiar and comforting. Their presence in writing serves the same purpose as a security blanket, always there to keep both the writer and reader at ease.

Metafiction, the use of a work within a work to commentate on the art itself, is a common technique in literature. The term was dubbed in “Philosophy and the Form of Fiction” by William Gass, who used it to define the self-reflexive tendency of a work of art. He used the term to describe some of the novels that had come to be known as “antinovels,” which the

Oxford English Dictionary defines as “a novel in which the conventions and traditions of the genre are studiously avoided.” In metafiction, as opposed to antinovels, the convention of novels are purposefully both used and brought to the forefront of the novel. As opposed to creating a novel which is distinctly un-novellike, the writer creates a work that constantly points out the ways in which the novel is a novel. Writing has a tendency to control the reader, and by pointing to its artificiality, a writer acknowledges this domination. Some writers who used metafiction were female British Victorian writers.

During the British Victorian period, female writers such as Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Anne Brontë, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell emerged. As they built their careers as successful authors, they all used pen names for publications in order to hide their female identity. Elizabeth Gaskell was known as Cotton Mather Mills. The Brontë sisters chose the androgynous names Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Perhaps the most thorough appropriation of a pen name is George Eliot, who continues to be known by this name rather than her real name, Mary Anne Evans. As they became well known, the Brontë sisters and Elizabeth Gaskell all shed their pseudonyms. Their elevated statuses as successful writers allowed them to share their true opinions. Thus, their lives are a display of the power and influence a writer gains through books. Additionally, all these authors were well educated. Books played an important role in their lives, so it is perhaps not surprising that books are objects of power in the writers’ novels. The Brontë sisters show in their novels the comfort and safety books can provide. As such, they are especially powerful tools of abuse when they are misused. At the same time, female characters draw power from books and use them to direct the course of their lives. Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871) contains a strong and independent narrator. This narrator displays the dominance a storyteller has over the reader. Gaskell’s novels *North and South* (1855) and *Wives and*

Daughters (1866) depict the use of books and knowledge to control a particular subordinated group, similar to the way British colonialism operates. Thus, female Victorian writers demonstrate the power and influence of books by placing them within their novels.

The Brontë sisters use the physical presence of books to show the way books can help bring those who are not traditionally in power in society to the forefront. As female writers who were the daughters of an Irish curate of the Anglican Church, they had used books and writing for this purpose in their own lives. The book which propelled them to fame and notoriety was *Jane Eyre* (1847). Thus, it should be addressed first in my discussion of the Brontës. Charlotte Brontë's novel tells the story of an orphaned girl, who is alone most of the novel. In the beginning, books are used to subjugate Jane. She is physically abused when they are thrown at her and emotionally abused when they are denied to her. Despite this, Jane finds comfort in reading and holding books. As she matures, she gains independence through books. Finally, books become Jane's source of income, as she earns a living as a governess. Her independence remains at the end, as she must help her husband read. Her ability to read when he cannot makes their marriage an equal partnership, unlike many at the time.

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is perhaps the second most well-known Brontë novel. Additionally, Catherine, the female protagonist, is the best example in a Brontë novel of a female character who dominates those around her through both physical force and manipulation. Emily uses books to empower her female characters in a different way from her sister Charlotte. She shows the way a book can be used to emotionally overpower a female character by describing the reading of a diary with rape-like terms. The diary, which was written by Catherine, was a way for her to rebel against society's rules. Because it was written in the margins of a Bible, Catherine also rejected society's conventions by writing in it. Additionally,

the majority of the novel takes place in the margin of the story. It is a story within a story, and the more important of the two stories is the story being told. Similarly, the characters that are traditionally in the margins of society are the most interesting and important. Heathcliff is an orphaned gypsy, and Catherine is a woman. Traditionally, they are not the people in power in society. However, within the confines of the book, they may come to attention.

Anne Brontë wrote both *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1847). *Agnes Grey* was published along with *Wuthering Heights*. At the time, books were typically published as three volumes. *Wuthering Heights* was about two volumes long and *Agnes Grey* was about one volume long. Thus, Anne's novel could not be published without depending on another novel. However, *Tenant* was published entirely by itself. Thus, this book gave Anne independence as a writer. Within the novel, books are a means of abuse by male characters. Most importantly, it is through a book that the main characters come together in a healthy, romantic relationship. This is a different manifestation of the power of books and their ability to shape the heroine's future.

As Charlotte Brontë worked on the second novel she would have published, *Shirley* (1849), her siblings died from various illnesses. Branwell passed away first and was followed within the year by Emily and then Anne. *Shirley* was finished without the help of Charlotte's siblings. It is also the first time Charlotte was without her writing community and writing independently. The story is similar to Anne's *Tenant* in that relationships are formed in scenes of reading, similar to the bonds formed between the Brontë siblings. Additionally, the novel addresses social issues, such as tensions between genders, classes, and nationalities. These issues also tend to come to a head in scenes of reading. Charlotte shows the way an author's voice in a novel has the power to address issues in society.

While the Brontë sisters use the physical presence of novels to empower their female characters, George Eliot uses a narrator with a distinctive personality to display the power of a storyteller in a story. Eliot's narrator has a way of manipulating readers while guiding them through the story. In *Middlemarch*, the narrator has a greater responsibility than most narrators do, as it is not just a story that must be told. Rather, the narrator is the guide on a tour of the town of Middlemarch, an almost perfect microcosm of the world. Every type of person is represented in the town in regards to gender, class, and intelligence. Because the narrator is so opinionated, the reader is left with a distinct impression of the town, and thus the world. Eliot's narrator shows the power of a storyteller to influence the way the audience views the world.

Throughout history, those with knowledge are likewise the ones who have power and influence in a culture. Elizabeth Gaskell shows the way education can help one group dominate another in her novels *North and South*, and *Wives and Daughters*. For instance, the distribution of knowledge distinguishes the position of the North over the South in *North and South*. Additionally, those with education, such as Margaret, see themselves as superior to those who are uneducated, such as the factory workers. As the Hales attempt to teach those in the North, they are similar to colonizers who teach their traditions to those they have taken over. Gaskell herself appropriates authors and manipulates them to her own purpose in her book, similar to the way colonizers use local resources, such as spices, for their own purposes. Thus, Gaskell shows the way knowledge can be used to dominate any other group.

The use of devices such as books, a strong narrative voice, and education within novels shows the way characters may be empowered with knowledge. Likewise, they reveal the way an author controls her audience. Writing is used to assert a writer's voice, and as such, the presence of writing and reading in a novel are an acknowledgement of this power. This acknowledgement

is revealed as characters, especially those who are typically in positions of submission, use books, storytelling, and knowledge to attain authority.

Chapter I

Reading Minds: Control through Books

From the time Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was first published in 1847, myths surrounded the lives of the Brontë sisters. The popularity of their novels led to a fascination with the women themselves. For instance, Lucasta Miller wrote in *The Brontë Myth* that even in their lifetimes, the sisters were portrayed as everything from saints to sex-starved madwomen. As successful female writers, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne understood the power and influence a book could have on their society. Together with their brother Branwell, they formed a community of writers. This community helped all grow into stronger writers as they collaborated on their stories. Instead of a single writer working to create a novel, one writer worked with three harsh critics and editors. They wrote together from the time they were young. The Brontës were preoccupied with the publishing process of books. It was not enough just to write, but the Brontës wanted other people to read their stories as a way for them to express their views. When they were children, they often pretended to publish their own books like *The Tales of Angria*. The preoccupation with physical novels comes out within the stories as readers compare life to books.

Throughout the Brontë novels, there is a strong physical presence of books and the reading of books. This use of books within a novel is a literal use of metafiction. The Brontës portray books as a safe and comforting place in which female characters can reveal their true thoughts and emotions. Because a work of art holds the secrets of its creator, it is often the key to understanding the artist. This understanding is often a means to bring people together. Additionally, they may be used as an instrument of abuse, followed by a means of uprising. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1847), and *Shirley*

(1849), the Brontës show that books are powerful tools that help traditionally less-powerful individuals take control. Books function in the novel in various ways depending upon the author and the novel.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë became the oldest child in the Brontë family after her older sisters died of illnesses contracted at boarding school in 1825 when Charlotte was 9. Although it was an acquired role, Charlotte became the leader of the children as her literary career launched those of her younger sisters. The publication of *Jane Eyre* was the first from the family. It is the story of Jane Eyre, an orphan who is raised by rich relatives until they send her to a strict boarding school. At the school, she is educated, and when she is older, she becomes a teacher.

Eventually, Jane leaves the school and becomes a governess at Thornfield Hall, the home of Mr. Rochester. She bonds with her employer, and the two plan to marry. At the wedding, a man reveals that Mr. Rochester is already married to Bertha. Jane runs away and befriends the Riverses, who are later revealed to be her cousins. Their uncle dies, and all become wealthy. Jane finally returns to Thornfield to discover it has burned to the ground, and Bertha has died. She finds Rochester blind and missing a hand. They marry and live happily ever after.

Throughout *Jane Eyre*, Brontë empowers Jane through books and knowledge. For Jane, books are a source of comfort. Due to her connection to books, they can cause the most pain, if their purpose is perverted. However, Jane also uses them as a source of independence and power.

When Jane is young, books are a safe place of escape from her situation as a dependent at Gateshead. In one incident, Jane hides from her cousin John Reed in the windowsill of the kitchen while reading Thomas Bewick's *The History of British Birds* (1804). Although Jane is

generally uninterested in the text in the book, she does like the introductory passages that are written much more poetically:

Where the Northern Ocean, in vast whirls,
Boils round the naked, melancholy isles
Of farthest Thule; and the Atlantic surge
Pours in among the stormy Hebrides. (*Jane Eyre* 6)

The language is not that of a science book, but rather it is romantic. The passage describes the ‘melancholy isles,’ using personification to describe the islands as having human emotions. This is a device used in literature, not scientific articles. Furthermore, the passage Jane quotes describes the birds’ various habitats. She invests in the part of the book about distant locations, revealing her longing to travel. Jane uses a book to imagine places other than her current location. Another time she uses a book to escape is when she is sick after the incident in the Red Room. Bessie tries to console her by letting her look at *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). Once again, the book is about adventure and far-away places. Whenever the Reeds mistreat her, she immediately turns to books to comfort her. While Jane does not feel secure within Gateshead, the pages of a book protect her.

Abuse or misuse of one’s safe place can cause physical or psychological harm. The same happens with Jane and her sanctuary within books. Specifically, Jane is degraded through physical abuse and the denial of knowledge. For instance, John uses books as a means of physical abuse when he throws *Bewick’s History of British Birds* at Jane. The book causes a head wound that likely contributes to Jane’s hysterical episode in the Red Room. As one of her favorite books, it is an important part of her intellectual pursuits. When John turns it into an object that causes Jane pain, he takes power from her. Jane says, “I had read Goldsmith’s

‘History of Rome,’ and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, &c. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud” (8-9). Not only does John take power from Jane by misusing a book, but also, she recognizes him as a tyrant through knowledge obtained in another book. Because she feels an emotional connection to books, perversion of their purpose is psychologically damaging, particularly this book. The book is symbolically significant, and thus, the wound is merely a physical manifestation of the emotional harm. Furthermore, John takes the item that helped Jane develop her thoughts, and thus, he figuratively took her ability to think. The incident alters Jane’s entire attitude toward books. As she looks at *Gulliver’s Travels* after the incident in the Red Room, it is no longer filled with magic, excitement and adventure. Jane says:

This book I had again and again perused with delight. I considered it a narrative of facts and discovered in it a vein of interest deeper than what I found in fairy tales... Yet when this cherished volume was now placed in my hand—when I turned over its leaves, and sought in its marvelous pictures the charm I had, till now, never failed to find—all was eerie and dreary; the giants were gaunt goblins, the pigmies malevolent and fearful imps. (17)

Books no longer hold the joy Jane previously found in them. Instead of showing her fantastical dreams, *Gulliver’s Travels* is full of nightmares. The physical abuse is such so she seems separated her from her intellectual potential.

The lack of access to books is also a way to oppress the members of society who are not traditionally in power: the lower class and women. When John takes Bewick’s book from Jane, he claims the book does not belong to her because she is dependent on the Reeds for food and shelter. John says, “You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says;

you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma's expense. I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine" (8). John is stating that knowledge does not belong to Jane because she is poor and cannot afford it. As an orphan, Jane is in a lower class than her cousins. One factor keeping lower classes out of positions of power and in poverty was a lack of education. While books are important for John Reed as an economic commodity and sign of social status, they carry little personal value for him. John does not care about the books as much as keeping Jane in her proper social status. Much later in the novel, another of Jane's cousins, St. John Rivers, also uses books to overpower Jane as a woman. Women were not traditionally educated in the same way as men. This kept them in a subservient position in the same way it kept the poorer citizens in poverty. When St. John has Jane exchange her German studies for his Hindustani tutoring, he manipulates her. After he successfully changes her intellectual focus, St. John tries to force her to go with him to India as a missionary. St. John must first overtake Jane's thoughts; then he can control her physically.

Female characters are empowered when they have access to books. One way is by forming female reading communities. Cheryl Wilson says in her essay "Female Reading Communities in *Jane Eyre*" that these communities of female readers represent a rebellion against patriarchal society: they are a way for women to free themselves. For instance, Jane's cousins Diana and Mary Rivers read and study to gain freedom. With German knowledge, they can charge more money as governesses, and they can support themselves with independent careers. Similarly, Jane uses her studies to earn a life independent of either the Reeds or Lowood School. Uninterrupted female reading communities in *Jane Eyre* serve to empower women. The first reading community forms after Jane observes Helen Burns, a student at Lowood, as a

solitary reader. She only becomes a significant character when Jane joins her and discusses the book. The specific book they discuss reveals Helen's character, allowing the reader to know her through the reading community. As Alison Hoddinot explains, "It is in their references to other named writers and artists that Charlotte, in particular, and Anne, to a lesser extent, establish aspects of character and clarify thematic concerns" (2). Helen is reading Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. It is a moralistic novel that explains that human happiness cannot be achieved, and people should accept that fact. This is very similar to Helen's attitude about life; she is moralistic and expects more out of the next life than the current one. Helen Burns also educates herself outside of the school curriculum with her own books, and teachers punish her for reading during lessons. Lowood School, which is Jane's reading community, becomes especially important within the confines of female society. When Jane has tea with Miss Temple, it positively reinforces Jane's reading interests by providing her with physical and emotional comfort through books: "They spoke of books: how many they had read! What stores of knowledge they possessed!" (*Jane Eyre*, 62). Jane's interest in books and reading is encouraged by the links to other women readers.

Female reading is an empowering act, but Wilson says that it is constantly "policed and challenged by patriarchal forces" (1). Men try to control the act and circumvent an exchange of power. For example, St. John takes over Jane's studies and gives himself authority over her future. Another example of men interrupting the reading process is when Jane is first introduced as a solitary reader on the windowsill, and John, a male who feels the need to halt female reading, breaks the scene of reading. Jane may educate herself, but only in secret or under the rules of society. Men also break communities of female readers. Lowood School is the first female reading community Jane experiences. Together, the teachers and female pupils read and

learn. However, Mr. Brocklehurst, patron of Lowood School, often interrupts the scenes at the school. Jane fears he will destroy her community when he specifically tells the other students not to befriend her. In another instance, Mr. Brocklehurst cuts their hair, demonstrating his power over them. Not only can he control their studies, but he can also control their appearance within the confines of the school. In the world of the novel, the women are empowered by the act of reading. However, male characters interrupt the scenes of reading in an attempt to take back control.

Jane gains independence through reading and education. She supports herself, by becoming a teacher and then a governess. Jane best demonstrates the power she has gained when she returns to Rochester. She lists reading to him as one of the services she will offer. The act integrates the two genders together in their reading and gives them equal control over books. Jane says Rochester may only see books through her (*Jane Eyre*, 384). Men no longer control Jane's reading; she is in fact more in control over the books they read together. She even retains this power when Rochester regains some of his sight because Rochester still cannot read or write well: "he cannot read or write much; but he can find his way without being led by the hand" (384). Although Rochester can go through the world without assistance, he cannot navigate the world of literature without Jane's guidance. Thus, it is ultimately a woman who has access to books, while her male counterpart may only enter with permission.

The most important way in which Jane has gained power over books is in the way present-day Jane narrates her own story. When she leaves Thornfield, Jane compares her life to a novel. Jane says, "Not one thought was to be given either to the past or the future. The first was a page so heavenly sweet— so deadly sad — that to read one line of it would dissolve my courage and break down my energy. The last was an awful blank: something like the world

when the deluge was gone by” (317). Nancy Armstrong says in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* that in order for Jane to be accepted as a writer, she must first break from the existing institutions: “To achieve a position from which to speak with authority, Jane must abdicate roles within the economic, religious, and educational institutions of her society” (46). Jane’s independence leads her ability to tell her story. As Garrett Stewart says in *Dear Reader*, Jane is fully aware that she is writing about her life in a book and often addresses the reader directly (242-249). “Reader, I married him,” Jane says of Rochester (*Jane Eyre*, 382). This line is a display of her power in multiple ways. First, Jane acknowledges her own role in telling the story. Secondly, she acknowledges there is someone reading her story, someone listening to her voice. Finally, the line is in active voice. While Jane was the object of male action in the past, such as when she was controlled by Mr. Brocklehurst, here she is the actor against a male object. Rochester wanted to marry Jane, whatever the circumstances. However, Jane controlled when they married.

Throughout *Jane Eyre*, Jane has a connection with books as a source of comfort. Jane is denied books due to her status as a poor child. However, through female reading communities, Jane uses books to gain independence. This is most obvious as the present-day Jane tells her own story.

Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*

Emily Brontë was the third child in the family to live to adulthood. Just as Charlotte Brontë showed a fascination with nature in *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë’s displayed an interest in the English moors as they are the setting for her novel *Wuthering Heights*. The majority of the novel is told by Nellie, a housekeeper at the great house Thrushcross Grange. She previously

worked at Wuthering Heights, the only other large estate nearby. Nellie speaks to Mr. Lockwood, the latest tenant at Thrushcross Grange. The story she tells is of Heathcliff, the current owner of both houses. Mr. Earnshaw, who already had two children, Hindley and Catherine, adopted him. Throughout his childhood, Heathcliff was inseparable from the young Catherine. He left to make his fortune, the source of which is unknown, when Catherine married Edgar Linton. The Lintons have a child named Cathy. Heathcliff returns and Catherine dies. Heathcliff then spends his life trying to destroy the Lintons and Earnshaws. Mr. Lockwood does not stay at Thrushcross Grange very long, and he returns after a few months to discover Cathy Linton is engaged to Hareton Earnshaw, son of Hindly Earnshaw. The story is set in motion after Mr. Lockwood discovers Catherine's old diary, which is actually writing in the margins of a Testament, revealing Catherine's tendency to break with societal conventions. The novel deals with those who are on the margins of society. For instance, Heathcliff is described as having gypsy heritage. Additionally, as a young woman, Catherine does not have control over her future—she must marry the wealthy Edgar, not Heathcliff. The story itself also exists in the margins of the novel as the most important story is the one being told, not the frame story. The relationship between Cathy and Hareton shows that power can come from this place outside.

As in *Jane Eyre*, Catherine uses books to comfort herself, in *Wuthering Heights*. When Joseph punishes her and Heathcliff, Catherine occupies herself by writing in the margins of a book. Her diary says, "I reached this book, and a pot of ink from the shelf, and pushed the house-door ajar to give me light, and I have got the time on with writing for twenty minutes" (*Wuthering Heights*, 14-15). She does not feel the extent of Joseph's punishment because she pours her boredom into the book. However, Catherine is drawn away from her comfort by her male counterpart Heathcliff: "But my companion is impatient, and proposes that we should

appropriate the dairy woman's cloak, and have a scamper on the moors, under its shelter" (15). Although Catherine is a willing participant in running away to the moors, Heathcliff has interrupted her in her place of comfort.

The incident with Heathcliff is one way in which books are used to oppress through the male invasion of women's diaries. Maggie Berg discusses in *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margins* the view of books in a patriarchal society. Berg references Claude Lèvi-Strauss, who said that in a patriarchal society where women are exchanged as objects, women also function as signs. In *Wuthering Heights*, "Heathcliff's violence is presented as an act of inscription by which he turns women into texts" (Berg, 26) by physically marking them with bruises and cuts. Similarly, the violation of reading a woman's diary does not consider her humanity, especially because the diary is the most pure, physical representation of her mind. Berg discusses the incident in which Lockwood reads the writing in the testament:

Lockwood, on the other hand sees the text as a woman. His violation of the privacy of Catherine's diary is presented in sexual terms, as a substitute for penetrating Cathy. However, Lockwood is impotent as a reader and a lover: his famous nightmares combine fear of sex with fear of the text. The men in *Wuthering Heights* fear feminine sexuality which becomes associated with a similarly threatening textuality. Joseph despoils his sacred texts" he 'ransaks' the Bible for 'curses' to 'fling' at others, particularly the women. (26)

The scene in which Lockwood reads the diary uses sexual terms, reading as a rape of Catherine's mind. Furthermore, his invasion of the diary leads to a manifestation of Catherine's young ghost in Lockwood's dream that night. When she comes back to him, seeking shelter, he instead abuses her: "I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran

down and soaked the bedclothes” (*Wuthering Heights* 17). The language used in this scene could also describe sex with a virgin. Lockwood has progressed from attacking Catherine’s young mind to attacking her physically. Thus, the physical attack is paralleled to the psychological invasion. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, a similar scene occurs with Helen’s diary when her husband Huntingdon steals it. The scene is similarly written as a rape scene. Huntingdon violently takes the book, invading her innermost thoughts. At the same time, he takes the keys for her desk. Huntingdon does not invade her mind just once; he robs Helen of her ability to hide anything from him again so that her thoughts are no longer safe. It is as though he locked her in a room so that he could continue to rape her repeatedly.

The rape-like invasion of a book by a male character contrasts with the way Catherine invades a book. She does not violate or destroy the meaning of the Biblical Testament by writing in it. Rather, Berg says Catherine gives “voice to the femininity repressed by phallogentric discourse. Filling in the blanks in the ‘dominant discourse,’ which espouses the values of the status quo, is precisely the strategy advocated by the French feminist Luce Irigaray to subvert patriarchy” (26-27). Thus, by defacing the Testament, Catherine is interjecting her female voice into the dominant male discourse. Berg says the writing in the margins “represents a subversion of the values which the conventional characters embody, as well as resistance to sexual domination” (26-27). Thus, it is a peaceful protest as opposed to a violent attack. Catherine’s writing in the margins of the book also draws attention away from the main dialogue. Instead of the Biblical passages taking precedence, Catherine’s voice is louder. Lockwood does not even notice the actual writing in the book. Catherine’s writing in the testament shows how a female voice may become dominant in society if it is asserted loudly enough, even if it is from a position with traditionally less power.

Joseph originally forces the Testament upon Catherine, but she puts her own voice inside the book as a type of rebellion against the male power. For instance, Lockwood says, “I was greatly amused to behold an excellent caricature of my friend Joseph, -rudely yet powerfully sketched” (*Wuthering Heights*, 13). In turn, Catherine uses the book meant to subjugate her to mock Joseph. While Catherine does not have a particular reverence for the book, it is more significant that she wants to put her own thoughts into the book. Berg further argues that *Wuthering Heights* is not just about reading and writing but also about the parallelism between the “way we read and the way we treat and view others. All the major characters in the novel exhibit specific attitudes to texts which are linked to their gender” (27). The way women interject their voices into the narrative enhances the story rather than destroys the novel. Catherine offers it her voice and does not force herself to penetrate it. Catherine’s diary, a scene of reading that opens the novel, serves as a microcosm of the entire story and sets the story in motion. Lockwood’s curiosity stems out of Heathcliff’s strange reaction to the dream that was brought on by reading the diary.

Just as characters may invade books as Catherine and Lockwood do, they figuratively take over space in the margins of the novel *Wuthering Heights*. For example, the main characters mainly exist on the outside of the main story. Berg discusses *Wuthering Heights* in terms of spatiality in the novel. There are two great spaces in the novel: inside the great houses and outside on the moors. However, the most important scenes happen in the space between, on the threshold of houses, or in between the servants and the masters. Similarly, the most important part of the narrative is not within the frame story. The main story is Nelly telling a story to Lockwood while most of the novel is the part within Nelly’s story. Like Catherine’s diary, *Wuthering Heights* is structured so that the main story takes place in the margins.

The portion of *Wuthering Heights* written in the margins is the main plot and the main characters exist in this space. Berg explains, “All of the characters in the novel are implicitly placed in relation to a moral center and a margin, conveyed as much by their habitual or preferred physical locations as by the espoused views” (24). The importance of the characters to the book as a whole is based on their relation to the marginal, or inner story. Lockwood is only the listener and as such does not take part in the action of the inner story; he only exists in the framework. Most importantly, Catherine only exists in the inner story. She is only introduced through her diary. Catherine is writing in the margins of a testament, a religious book, which moves her away from the moral center, both physically and spiritually. This disrespect for a religious book shows her general disrespect for religions throughout the novel. Instead of the conventional religion, Catherine essentially replaces religion with Heathcliff. For instance, Catherine dreams at one point that she is in Heaven, but she is miserable because she is not with Heathcliff. Instead of moving on when she dies, she stays on earth to be with Heathcliff, and eventually with his ghost. Likewise, she replaces the words in the Bible with words about Heathcliff. Berg explains Catherine’s position in the novel: “Although she [Catherine] is already dead when the novel opens, and dies only a third of the way through the inner story, she seems to haunt the text, always hovering at its margins” (25). Catherine is not in the novel as herself; she only exists in stories. Her ghost is able to appear both through the writing in the margins of the testament and through Nelly’s story to Lockwood. Although Catherine has long since been buried, she still exists through stories. Her presence is so prevalent, that the reader seems to know her first-hand. The story within the novel is so powerful it can figuratively make Catherine rise from the dead.

In contrast, young Cathy and Hareton exist in both the outer and inner stories. They are brought fully into the present-day story through scenes of reading. Reading communities serve as an important source of social interaction, according to Leah Price's "Reading: The State of Discipline." Therefore, illiteracy causes a separation from society. In *Wuthering Heights*, the young Cathy and Hareton are brought together when she teaches him how to read. Conversely, earlier in the novel, they are separated by his illiteracy because Cathy scorns it. When Hareton wants to impress Cathy, he does so by trying to learn to read. The two do not communicate until Cathy gives him a book and offers to teach him to read: "Catherine employed herself in wrapping a handsome book neatly in white paper; and having tied it with a bit riband, and addressed it to 'Mr. Hareton Earnshaw'" (*Wuthering Heights*, 228). The two bond when Cathy specifically gives him the book, which represents congruence between their minds.

Additionally, Hareton and Cathy are poorer members of the upper class. Cathy and Hareton are both from old, wealthy families. However, Heathcliff has taken their inheritances, and they are both dependent on Heathcliff. While they have been pushed to the margins of society, they use literacy to come back to their rightful places.

Much of *Wuthering Heights* takes place in the margins of the novel. Catherine uses the margins of a book within the novel to show this area on the edge can be used as a source of power as she tells her own story. Additionally, those on the margin of society, such as Cathy and Hareton, demonstrate that those who are not in the controlling class can come to positions of control. Authors of novels exist in the margins of their novels. Their voices are typically second to the story they are telling. However, writing a book is a source of power. Thus, Brontë shows that those in the margins are influential through books.

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Anne Brontë was the youngest of the Brontë children. She is also typically the sister who is forgotten by contemporary popular culture. Anne published two novels in her lifetime: *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. *Agnes Grey* was published at the end of *Wuthering Heights*. However, the two books differ greatly in both structure and ambience. Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is structured similarly to *Wuthering Heights*, in which the main story occurs within a present-day frame. *Tenant* tells the story of Helen, a woman who escaped an abusive relationship with her husband, Arthur Huntingdon. The narrator, Gilbert, learns about Helen's life after she gives him her diary. Throughout the story, Helen uses books to hide her emotions. She does this by making her diary her confidant and reading as a defense. Huntingdon uses books as a form of both physical and psychological abuse. However, the diary also allows Helen to connect with Gilbert. This leads her to a happy life in a healthy relationship.

Helen hides herself within her diary by making it her only confidant to the difficulties of her marriage with Huntingdon. For instance, it is within the diary that Helen is first able to say she hates her husband. She does not even confide in the reader of *Tenant* as the reader is presented with the diary only through Gilbert. It is also through the diary that the reader first becomes properly acquainted with Helen as a character. Before Gilbert reads her diary, Helen seems strict and aloof. The diary, however, shows her to be very sensitive and reveals the reasons behind her strictness with her son. Sally Shuttleworth says that in Victorian literature, the inner workings of the mind became more important than their outward actions:

Selfhood no longer resided in the open texture of social act and exchange, but within a new interior space, hidden from view, inaccessible even to the subject's

own consciousness. Nor was inner self necessarily legible from or immanent within outer sign. The book of the self was not laid open for all to read; specific knowledge and skills were required to decode its language. (Shuttleworth, 9)

Helen is not at all what she appears to be on the outside. Rather, she hides herself in the deepest recesses of her mind, her diary. Within those pages, Helen hides her desire to leave her husband and the knowledge of his affair with Annabella. As the diary is the holder of Helen's secrets and emotions, it is as though it holds part of her soul. The revelation of the diary causes Huntingdon to further persecute Helen, taking any power she held within the household by stealing her money, jewelry and keys. He also destroys Helen's painting supplies, which likewise destroys her chance to support herself. The part of Helen that was hidden in her diary and discovered by Huntingdon delays her chance of escaping and living independently. When he invades her mind, he controls her life. Because, in a sense, the true Helen does not exist outside of the pages of her journal, she is powerless without it.

Helen uses books to hide by pretending to read when she is upset. She often picks up a book without actually reading it. One particular evening, Huntingdon will not stop pestering Helen to entertain him. She instead pretends to read: "I went on reading—or pretending to read, at least—I cannot say there was much communication between my eyes and my brain; for, while the former ran over the pages, the latter was earnestly wondering when Arthur would speak next, and what he would say, and what I should answer" (*Tenant*, 213). In this case, Helen hides her uneasiness by pretending to be immersed in a book. Likewise, Helen uses a book later to try to calm herself before she runs away from Huntingdon. "I took up a book and tried to read. My eyes wandered over the pages, but it was impossible to bind my thoughts to their contents" (387-388). Because Helen's emotions will not allow her to focus on the book, she writes in her diary,

a different book. Thus, Helen separates herself from her husband by focusing on a book before she physically separates from him.

Huntingdon uses books to separate himself physically from Helen as well. Books at their most basic physical level can be used as instruments of abuse and control. Huntingdon is not a particularly studious man, and as such, he uses books for reasons other than intellectual pursuits. For instance, when Huntingdon's dog Dash will not come to him, he picks up a heavy book and throws it at the dog's head. The dog then runs out, and Huntingdon is separated from his favorite animal. Huntingdon similarly abuses Helen emotionally and physically throughout their marriage. When he throws the book at his dog, Huntingdon strikes his wife's hand as well. This is an early sign of the abuse to come. He dehumanizes her in this scene, treating her as he treats the dog.

Books alienate Helen from her husband. Huntingdon greatly dislikes books, and this separation of their minds leads to the end of their marital love and their separation. The use of a reading in this sense is to provide an excuse for two parties to ignore each other and to be ignored. Leah Price explains that it is an excuse for "civil inattention" (Price). As well as being separated from Helen by his lack of interest in books, Huntingdon is separated from his wife when she reads. Huntingdon gets terribly angry when Helen dares to read as opposed to amusing him:

I returned to my reading; and he endeavoured to occupy himself in the same manner; but, in a little while, after several portentous yawns, he pronounced his book to be 'cursed trash,' and threw it on to the table. It is significant that Arthur cannot appreciate the contents of a book, seeing them as mere objects. Indeed, without words and meaning, books may as well be thrown away. Then followed

eight or ten minutes of silence, during the greater part of which, I believe, he was staring at me. At last his patience was tired out. (*Tenant*, 212)

Arthur is actually jealous of his wife's preference for a book over her husband. She prefers her own mind to his. Reading also makes her mind impenetrable.

Books serve to bring characters together as well as drive them apart. When Gilbert and Helen first begin their acquaintance, they find a shared interest in similar books. Gilbert makes visits to Helen with the excuse that he is there to loan her books. When he gives her a gift as a token of his affection, it is a book that he had specifically ordered for her. While this particular book is refused by Helen, it symbolizes her unwillingness to bow to Gilbert's addresses. Helen insists on paying for the book herself, maintaining her independence. She will not accept the book as a gift, "Because I don't like to put myself under obligations that I can never repay" (74). This book then causes an embarrassing scene between the two and could have caused their separation. However, Gilbert is instead given the chance to show he does not have less-than-honorable intentions. He says, "It is nonsense to talk about putting yourself under obligations to me when you must know that in such a case the obligation is entirely on my side—the favour on yours" (75). The book is a symbol of their shared interests.

The ultimate instance of a book bringing characters together in *Tenant* is in Gilbert reading Helen's diary. The imparting of her diary to him shows great confidence and intimacy. Helen gives Gilbert the diary and gives him power. A large portion of the novel is Gilbert reading Helen's diary, which she has shared in confidence. Because the story is framed as a letter to Gilbert's brother-in-law, Helen has actually given Gilbert power to share her innermost thoughts with his reader. With the divulging of her secret past, Helen and Gilbert are able to confess their attachments for the first time. She claims to have disclosed the information in the

diary as a way of excusing her former conduct. However, although the diary allows the two to be completely open with one another, it also leads to their separation. After the revelation of their mutual feelings, Helen feels she must relocate to a new hideout. Furthermore, the diary serves as a way for Helen to hide her innermost emotions, thus serving the other important function of books within the novel. It is through the diary that Gilbert and Helen reach a new level of intimacy. It is the key to her innermost mind and thus the revelation of the diary to Gilbert brings them closer together. There are no more secrets.

The book that almost causes Helen and Gilbert to separate in *Tenant* is Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion*, Lord Marmion convinces a nun Constance de Beverley to leave the convent and run away with him. He brings her to moral degradation. The fact that Gilbert is insisting on Helen's taking this particular book could symbolize that he is tempting her to follow the immoral path. Helen, like Constance, could run away with Gilbert. After all, she has already left her husband. However, Helen will not accept the book except on her own terms by paying for it; similarly, she will not be with Gilbert until she can do it the right way and with a clear conscience. Thus, Helen has come to represent the version of Constance de Beverley who is in control. In *Jane Eyre*, St. John also gives *Marmion* to Jane. She had previously refused to run away with Rochester and had thus refused Sir Walter Scott's plot. St. John offers her a marriage, which goes against her moral integrity in that he wants to marry her despite a lack of affection on either side. In the scene where St. John brings Jane *Marmion*, he also discovers her real name. This leads to her independent wealth and the eventual reunion between Jane and Rochester. However, their reunion is only after there is no moral ambiguity. Books cannot immorally bring together two proper people. They can only bring the two together when it is acceptable.

Helen uses her diary as a source of power as she expresses her emotions in it. The power of the diary is so strong that it causes Huntingdon worry. When it reveals the demise of her marriage, the diary helps Helen's relationship with Gilbert to mature. Thus, writing and sharing her story gives Helen the ability to control her own life.

Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*

Although Anne was the youngest Brontë sibling, Charlotte out-lived her and their other siblings by six years. During this time, she completed two novels without the collaboration in which she had come to rely. These novels were *Shirley* and *Villette* (1853). However, *Shirley* marks the change in Charlotte's writing as it was while she worked on it that her life took a tragic turn, and her three siblings died within eight months of one another. The novel shows a maturity and sobriety which would develop more fully in *Villette*. *Shirley* tells the story of Caroline Helstone, who is completely dependent on her uncle. She is also closely connected to Robert Moore, a mill owner whose sister teaches French to Caroline. Caroline is unhappy with her life when Shirley, an independent heiress, settles in the town. Louis Moore, Robert's brother and Shirley's old tutor, also comes to the town. Issues regarding heritage and class arise between the four main characters. The novel concludes with Caroline marrying Robert and Shirley marrying Louis. Throughout the novel, relationships are formed through scenes of reading. In these scenes, tensions regarding nationality, gender and class are addressed and resolved.

In *Shirley*, Louis and Shirley are not just brought together by scenes of reading, but also through Louis' diary. As with the scene of reading in the schoolroom between Shirley and Louis, the diary becomes an important tool for Louis to express his emotions. Although this particular book does not actually bring Shirley and Louis together, it makes the reader aware of

the connection. The passages from his diary are the only ones presented directly from a character and not filtered by the narrator. Before one of these passages, the narrator stops and says, “Yet again, a passage from the blank book, if you like, reader; if you don’t like it, pass it over” (587). Brontë presents it so that everything in the passage does not come from her narrator. A clearer idea of the developing relationship is presented through the diary: “Since that day I called S. to me in the school-room, and she came and sat so near my side; since she opened the trouble of her mind to me—asked my protection—appealed to my strength: since that hour I abhor Solitude. Cold abstraction-fleshless skeleton-daughter-mother-and mate of Death!” (487). Thus, a book reveals the budding intimacy with Shirley. Warmth is often associated with positive feelings, such as happiness and love. Louis feels cold death when he is alone, specifically without Shirley. If her presence makes him feel warm love, her absence must generate feelings of cold loneliness.

Throughout *Shirley*, there are tensions between the French and English, and men and women. However, within the confines of the reading scenes, these issues are resolved in favor of one group. A peace between the sexes can exist in the scenes of reading. The *Coriolanus* scene allows for a socially acceptable and intimate interaction and brings Robert and Caroline closer together. Caroline says that she is completely content without adding another person to their group. Because Hortense, Robert’s French sister, is not participating, it is as though the couple is alone. Caroline says, “But it is strange—though we want no third—fourth, I mean (she hastily and with contrition glanced at Hortense), living person among us—so selfish we are in our happiness” (86). They are sitting close and are leaning in on a single book, so they are physically near. Likewise, Robert and Caroline are also mentally close as they are both completely focused on a single subject. At the beginning of the scene, Hortense wants Caroline

to embroider while Robert reads. However Robert argues that “she must follow the reading with her eyes; she must look at the book” (88). Her whole attention has to be on the book, and thus Robert too. As the book brings one of the main couples in the novel together, it is an imperative part of the novel’s plot. The couples are brought together through a mutual understanding of books.

Brontë uses her own power to address social issues. One she discusses is national biases. Throughout the Brontës’ novels, there are underlying anti-French sentiments. For instance, Adele’s French mother in *Jane Eyre* is portrayed as flighty and shallow. In *Shirley*, the first long interaction the reader sees between Caroline and Robert occurs in Chapter VI: *Coriolanus*. It is so named for the tragedy by Shakespeare, which the two read together. Robert has ancestry in both England and France, while Caroline is purely English. This is displayed by her refusing to play games and insistence that they read for entertainment. Caroline’s goal in choosing Shakespeare is to make Robert entirely English, because Shakespeare is the best-known English author and symbolizes Englishness. Caroline says, “Your French forefathers don’t speak so sweetly, nor so solemnly, nor so impressively as your English ancestors, Robert. To-night you shall be entirely English: you shall read an English book” (86). Caroline goes on to say Robert is not allowed to read the book like a Frenchman and refuse to be impressed by it. She threatens to leave if he does not interpret the book as an Englishman and not a Frenchman. Caroline goes so far as to say Shakespeare will awaken his nature. Thus, Caroline controls what he reads as well as how he interprets it.

The Frenchwoman Hortense’s presence tries to interfere with the reading in the scene. She represents both what it is to be French and feminine. The French quality tries to interfere with the reading of an English book as Hortense tries to make Caroline focus on her embroidery

while Robert reads. If Caroline does not focus on the reading, Robert might pronounce the English words with his French accent. However, the English defeat the French in this case because Caroline focuses on the book and does not sew. Robert's English heritage dominates as he encourages Caroline to focus on the English book and not bow to the Frenchwoman's request. British dominance is shown through the use and emphasis of an English book. Thus, books are used in this scene to define what it is to be English. In the schoolroom scene between Louis and Shirley that takes place toward the end of *Shirley* the exact opposite of the *Coriolanus* scene occurs. For instance, in this scene a French book is chosen. This suggests that there is a new tolerance in England for internationalism by the end of the novel.

As well as the tensions between those of different nationalities, *Shirley* addresses the question of gender roles. The *Coriolanus* scene addresses the question of gender roles in terms of Caroline and Robert's interaction as well. It is significant they use the Shakespearean tragedy "Coriolanus." In the play, Coriolanus is only dissuaded from destroying Rome by his mother, Volumnia. A peace treaty is then formed. Volumnia takes a position that is not traditionally feminine in that she essentially leads the army. Similarly, Shirley typically breaks the Victorian woman's model while Caroline perfectly fits the mold. In the *Coriolanus* scene, the book is used as a way for Robert, the man, to dominate Hortense, the woman. He focuses Caroline's attentions on the book, which is an activity for either gender but more associated with men, as opposed to embroidery, which is entirely feminine. In the *Coriolanus* scene, though, Caroline chooses a book for Robert and establishes a control over Robert that is absent throughout the rest of the novel. During the scene, she acts as Robert's teacher at his request. Caroline even says, "I am to be the teacher then, and you my pupil?" (87). The fact that Robert asks Caroline to act as the teacher suggests that he retains ultimate control. However, the role reversal still continues.

For instance, because Robert does not read the comic scenes well, she takes the book and reads for him, like a teacher. Caroline corrects his pronunciation of English.

Another way the social issue of gender is illustrated in *Shirley* is through the scenes of reading between Louis and Shirley. Throughout the story, Shirley consistently breaks the gender stereotype and attempts to make herself androgynous. For instance, she introduces herself as Shirley Keeldar, esquire. She is an independent, land-owning heiress. In the relationship between Shirley and Louis, Shirley is the dominant person. Their interaction began as a teacher and a pupil. When Louis and Shirley are reunited, he can take liberties and control over her only by acting the part of a tutor. He takes power in his role as a tutor that is absent at other times in the novel. For example, the scene in the schoolroom when Shirley reads to him shows their role reversal as Louis insists she read to him: “‘You proposed to read to me a few nights ago,’ said he. ‘I could not hear you then; my attention is now at your service. A little renewed practice in French may not be unprofitable: your accent, I have observed, begins to rust.’ ‘What book shall I take?’” (451). Shirley submits to Louis’ preferences in this scene, whereas she is typically in charge. He does not just control what she reads, but also makes her pull her hair back, showing him her physical appearance. The first time the two switched roles was in a different reading scene immediately before the schoolroom scene. Louis was sick and Shirley appeared to have an extra upper hand as the healthy one. She attempted to assert her power by reading to him. However, Louis forced her to leave and not read. Whether reading is forced or refused, it is consistently a tool of domination. Like the *Coriolanus* scene, a book is used as a source of control. Ultimately, Brontë uses the book as an illustration of domination and control between men and women.

The final social issue that abounds in *Shirley* is the conflict between the privileged and working classes; it, too, is expressed through the introduction of books. While the gender roles are reversed in both the *Coriolanus* and schoolroom scenes, the masculine character dominates in the Shirley and Louis scene. The scene addresses tensions between the social classes that interacting throughout *Shirley*. Louis has to work for a living while Shirley is a wealthy heiress. However, Louis has power over Shirley as her former tutor. The social role of a tutor is ambiguous in Victorian society; he dominates the children of the upper class while being of a less-privileged class. Louis takes this position again in the schoolroom scene. His usurpation of Shirley mirrors the uprising of the mill workers. Once again, books represent sources of power.

Because the *Coriolanus* scene and schoolroom scene are positioned very differently in the novel, they address the social issues differently. The *Coriolanus* scene is at the beginning of the novel. It is before any conflict between Robert and Caroline. It has the hope of a new romance and of possible peace. However, after the scene, the divisions between the French and English, men and women, and classes become wider. The schoolroom scene on the other hand, takes place near the end of the novel. Louis and Shirley have already had a great rift, and the scene is their coming back together. It also settles the conflict between the French and the English as both types of literature are read in the scene. The scene provides a more realistic, but still optimistic, view for the future. This future is free from social divisions. Regardless of the future presented, both scenes illustrate significant social concerns.

By the time *Shirley* was written, Charlotte Brontë was a famous author. She had personally witnessed the widespread impact a book could have. This is perhaps why she addressed so many of society's problems in *Shirley*. As a writer, she could bring attention to inequality in nationality, gender and class.

Conclusion

Throughout their writing careers, the Brontës collaborated on their writing. This brought them closer as sisters. Perhaps because they formed their own bonds around books, their characters often do likewise. The Brontës were involved with writing from young ages, writing *The Tales of Angria* when they were children. They were interested in writing and the power of publishing. They often used their novels to address social issues for this very reason. The influence that comes from controlling books is often reflected in their novels. The image of the book represented freedom, independence, and success for the Brontës. Their education helped them to create personal income as teachers and governesses. More importantly, they grew up with a love of books and a strong desire to be published. It was not enough just to write manuscripts; they also needed to have their writing turned into a physical book. Charlotte reveals through *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* that writing books are a form of expression. In this way, they can also help commentate on society's problems and spur change. Emily reveals the subtle use of books to empower those in the margins of society as she uses the margins of *Wuthering Heights* to bring two characters to the front, when they might otherwise be ignored. Anne uses *Tenant* to describe the way relationships can form through reading. This directly mirrors the sisters' relationship as they were all connected through writing as a collective group.

Chapter II

The Narrative Character: Omnipotence over the Reader in *Middlemarch*

“Reader, I married him,” Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* famously tells her audience as she provides the conclusion to her own story. The narrative voice in Victorian writings is often outspoken and powerful. However, unlike Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, in which a character tells her own story, the narrator used by George Eliot is a third party. Unlike an omniscient god-like figure, the narrator still acts like a character instead of the voice of the author. The narrator as a construct is a metafictional character in the sense that it is the connection between the writer and the characters in the novel. Additionally, the narrator is also the mediator between the writer and the reader. Eliot favors a fluid narrator, one who moves from scene to scene as a watcher rather than a participator while remaining invisible. The narrator is not omniscient or unbiased, but instead remains the observer on the edge of action. One way the narrator shows involvement in the story is through opinions and sympathy for the players in the action. Additionally, the narrator uses free, indirect discourse to create a connection with the thoughts of the subjects of the novels, which in turn creates a sympathetic feeling toward them.

Rather than an omniscient god-like figure, the narrator in the works of Eliot, and especially in *Middlemarch*, acts as an additional character, showing certain sympathies. The narrator in *Middlemarch* is famous for having a distinct voice. Because this narrator is so developed, discussing the single novel as a character study of the narrator is a complete overview of Eliot’s narrative voice. *Middlemarch* tells the story of a large cast of characters in the fictional town of Middlemarch. The common link between the characters is the narrator. It centers around Dorothea Brooke, a wealthy woman who makes a distinct effort to make moralistic decisions. She initially marries an older man, Casaubon. However, she develops a

close friendship with Will Ladislaw, whom her husband quickly comes to resent. When Casaubon dies, he specifies in his will that Dorothea will lose her inheritance if she marries Ladislaw. She eventually refuses the independence she gained with Casaubon's inheritance and marries Ladislaw.

Eliot's narrator is androgynous. The narrator could easily be a man or a woman, and there is not textual evidence that one gender is more prominent. Because Eliot is a female writer with control over the narrator and ultimately the reader, the narrator will henceforth be referred to as a woman. Because the narrator can assume both gender roles, he/she has more power than if he/she were only one sex. Eliot uses the androgynous narrator because he/she is not inhibited by either gender role. The narrator is omnipotent over the reader's opinions and observations, but not omniscient. While the narrator is typically discussed in relation to the characters, the narrator also has a distinct relationship to the reader. The narrator can create feelings of sympathy, and thus the narrator in Eliot has omnipotence in the world of the novel by controlling the thoughts and emotions of the reader.

Watching the Narrative Unfold

In any narrative, the narrator controls the reader, often in third person accounts, taking the form of an omniscient god-like figure that looks on from above the action. In *Middlemarch*, the narrator sits just outside of the action, with a clear view of the action. While a considerable amount of *Middlemarch* is devoted to the narrator's speaking, rarely is space given to unbiased descriptions. The narrator often leaves other characters' speeches to drive the action. Indeed, flipping through the book shows more passages within quotation marks than not. When the narrator does speak, it is to commentate just like the other characters. The first paragraph of

Middlemarch opens with a description of Miss Dorothea Brooke: “Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appear to Italian painters” (Eliot 3). The narrator stands on the outside, observing, but she still has opinions on the characters. For instance, the inclusion of a reference to the Virgin Mary suggests the narrator is familiar with watching Dorothea and her habits. The narrator draws conclusions based on observation without exact certainty. Jakob Lothe notes the narrator’s use of “seems,” which he believes “suggests that although the narrator’s impression of Dorothea is probably correct, her vision of this character is necessarily limited and potentially biased” (Lothe 179-180). The narrator also utilizes “perhaps”: “Perhaps that was a more cheerful time” (Eliot 139). She once again presents a possible theory and introduces a concept that she is not decided on. Lothe goes on to suggest the narrator is one who observes and reports rather than one who participates in the action:

The opening also indicates that this third-person narrator is no ‘neutral’ and ‘omniscient’ narrative agent. As we continue reading, we note numerous links between the narrator’s observations and those made by several of the characters...The result is a literary discourse in which the possibilities of realist narrative are brilliantly exploited, and yet combined with reservations about precisely this kind of narrative. (180)

Accordingly, the narrator watches as an invisible character on the outskirts of the action as opposed to an omniscient god-like narrator who comments on the action in a removed way while watching from above. The reader looks to the narrator who reveals the other characters.

The Eliot narrator has a limited view and scope of knowledge. The narrator readily admits her lack of information: “Let him start for the Continent, then, without our pronouncing on his future. Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous” (Eliot 77). In suggesting her own lack of precise knowledge, she uses language of conjecture in descriptions instead of precise comparisons. For instance, in one description, the narrator says, “though Io, as a maiden apparently beguiled by attractive merchandise, was the reverse of Miss Brooke, and in this respect perhaps bore more resemblance to Rosamond Vincy, who had excellent taste in costume” (89). The narrator seems to make an incomplete conclusion based on the knowledge she holds. Instead of omniscience, she makes comments more akin to educated guesses. However, the narrator has omnipotence as evinced when she takes the need to control the view of the reader to a new level by outright giving instructions within the course of description in the novels. In describing Mr. Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*, she says, “Do not imagine his sickly aspect to have been of the yellow, black-haired sort” (115). Not only does the narrator control whom the reader sees, but she also attempts to control the imagination of the reader instead of allowing readers to paint their own picture of Mr. Bulstrode. In this case, the narrator fails where the author succeeds through the use of preterita, in which attention is purposefully drawn to a subject by telling the reader to ignore it. For the most part, the narrator controls the novel through direct address to the reader. Her omnipotence is of one who controls thought and, consequently, opinion.

While the Eliot narrator is not all knowing, the control of the reader makes her all-powerful. The narrator acknowledges her omnipotence when she directs the reader’s attention to the scratches made into a mirror or other pieces of polished furniture. The abrasions go in many different directions, yet if a candle is held to the surface, they appear to create a circle. “The

scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent” (Eliot 251). Hence, the mirror presents an idea of the person as the center while every event circles around them. Carried further, the person becomes the source of light, or knowledge. Consequently, they are the ultimate god-like figure. This idea is analyzed in Jacques Lacan’s “Mirror Stage,” in which the image a child first sees in a mirror is the one he will strive to realize for the rest of his life. Similarly, at the stage in a child’s life, he is only aware of the universe as it directly relates to him and his personal needs. This image shows the narrator has an understanding of the way basic human nature functions and, accordingly, an understanding of her characters. Additionally, the image reflects the power of fire, a lesser form of the ultimate power of the sun, to direct the gaze and make the gazer see a specific image. The direction of the gaze influences how one sees herself. The power of the gaze consequently controls fate.

Narrative Opinion and Irony

The narrator openly reveals her opinions of the characters and, more broadly, life. The initial presentation of St. Theresa in *Middlemarch* serves to introduce Dorothea as she first appears, as well as to clue the audience into the idea that Dorothea is child-like. The narrator says, “Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action” (Eliot 1). She goes on to say, “Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heartbeats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centring in some long-recognizable deed” (2). Throughout the novel, Dorothea attempts to direct change. However, the narrator suggests that she is an example of one who had the potential of St. Theresa, and yet failed. It is not so much Dorothea’s failure as it is society that has failed to give Dorothea an

environment in which she can become Theresa. The narrator displays her power by imposing her views on the reader rather than allowing the plot to unfold without commentary and analysis.

Furthermore, the *Middlemarch* narrator does not attempt to hide the passages in which she directly imposes her philosophy, suggesting she also does not attempt to hide the more subtle passages when she clearly favors some characters over others. At the end of Chapter VII, the narrator breaks the storyline by saying, “And here I must vindicate a claim to philosophical reflectiveness, by remarking that Mr. Brooke on this occasion little thought of the Radical speech which, at a later period, he was led to make on the incomes of the bishops. What elegant historian would neglect a striking opportunity for pointing out that his heroes did not foresee the history of the world, or even their own actions?” (60). The narrator stops the action with the express purpose of speaking about the actors in her story. She goes on to give examples of Henry of Navarre and Alfred the Great, which suggests her heroes are of the same realm as these. In addition, she once again ends with a question, challenging the reader to disagree with her decision to stop the action to commentate. However, the narrator does end with a final remark:

But of Mr. Brooke I make a further remark perhaps less warranted by precedent—namely, that if he had foreknown his speech, it might not have made any great difference. To think with pleasure of his niece’s husband having a large ecclesiastical income was one thing—to make a liberal speech was another thing; and it is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view” (60).

If Mr. Brooke had forgotten his speech, it would not have made a great difference. The narrator shows a distinct humor in this quote by drawing attention to Mr. Brooke’s hypocrisy.

The *Middlemarch* narrator realizes she alters her view of the characters throughout her commentary. She defends her back-and-forth opinion of Mr. Brooke by saying, “it is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view” (60). Once again, the confrontational narrator challenges the reader to disagree with her approach by calling any who would narrow-minded. The narrator not only has a strong voice, but she is also not afraid to assert it. One way she manages to present her argument is through a series of points similar to a lawyer. She goes on to once again present questions in the form of “Did not...” (77). She presents her argument with clear examples and then dares anyone to disagree with her opinion. She engages the narrator into her line of thinking again in describing Lydgate: “Does it seem incongruous to you that a Middlemarch surgeon should dream of himself as a discoverer? Most of us, indeed, know little of the great originators until they have been lifted up among the constellations and already rule our fates” (138). She presents the argument the reader would make, and immediately dispels it. The narrator has opinions and imposes them on the reader.

Narrators on Narrating

The narrator in *Middlemarch* discusses the art of story telling by experimenting with different methods of narrating. She takes time to criticize historians as opposed to other narrators, which suggests this narrator is a fictional historian who writes factual fictional accounts. By comparing herself to a historian, she suggests narrators should present novels as a historian does. However, the way she speaks with opinion and not pure fact also advances the idea that historians should write with more opinions of their subjects. She says,

We belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager, as if delivered from a campstool

in a parrot-house. I at least have so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe. (133-134)

She once again defends her way of narrating the story. The reason the lens rests on and is limited to this particular town is because the plot is so developed and complex that she does not have time or energy to focus on other areas of the world at this time. The narrator may not have omniscience, but she does have the ability to limit the knowledge of the reader.

The *Middlemarch* narrator also discusses the specifics of telling a love story in particular by saying people never tire of telling the way in which a woman is wooed and married by a man. She addresses both storyteller and reader in saying we never tire of telling the story nor weary of listening to it (Eliot 136). She almost criticizes the idea that a single love story is retold with only some of the particulars being changed. Questioning why this is the case, she blames “excess or poetry of stupidity” (136). The narrator further imposes her opinions on the reader by limiting the scope of what is seen. She speaks of Will’s inconsistent decisions and then suddenly breaks off with the comment, “But at present this caution against a too hasty judgment interests me more in relation to Mr. Casaubon than to his young cousin” (77). This is an opportunity for the narrator to comment subtly on the narrator’s role in general fiction. The narrator is omnipotent; she has the power to control the view the reader has of a work. While the narrator is not omniscient, she does know more than the reader does. The clear imposition exposes her realization that she controls the view of the story. Finally, at times the narrator presents an idea of a sensational method to plot presentation with language similar to a great mystery story: “Paris rang with the story of this death:-was it a murder?” (143). This moment is dramatic and

exciting. The remainder of the novel is mostly devoid of this dramatic aspect. It is not meant to be dramatic sensationalism, but rather it is a story of interwoven characters. The narrator tries this method of narrating before abandoning it.

Sympathizing with the Characters

As the narrator controls the reader, she also imposes her sympathy for her subjects on her readers. Narrators achieve this through outright sympathetic language, equality of presentation, commentary on characters, and drawing connections between both themselves and characters and also between characters and readers. Rae Greiner discusses in “Sympathy Time” the sympathy created in conjunction with knowledge in the novels of the 19th century. Sympathy is especially evoked by the innovation of the time: free indirect discourse. This device blends the characters’ voices with the speaking narrator so the narrator comes to identify with the characters so completely that they speak together. With a knowledge of the characters that they are describing, narrators create a sympathy for them within themselves as well as within the reader. Furthermore, Granier explains that Eliot purposely uses sympathy to depict ethical dilemmas, which forces the reader not only to feel sympathy for the characters but also to judge them. Without the narrator depicting certain scenes and pushing the reader toward certain characters, the reader would develop sympathies freely. This pushing of the reader’s emotions is yet another display of the narrator’s power.

Language of the Narrator

Eliot’s narrators show a sympathy for their characters with their language. The use of “poor” especially shows they are watching with an understanding of how their characters are

feeling. Eliot's *Middlemarch* narrator shows an intense sympathy for characters with such language as, "Poor Lydgate! or shall I say, Poor Rosamond! Each lived in a word of which the other knew nothing" (157). The narrator sees the problems within a budding relationship, and yet, as an outsider, she is powerless to help. She can merely watch as an invisible outsider as the world crumbles around the characters. As the story goes on, Rosamond will be disappointed that Lydgate is not actually from an aristocratic family, and Lydgate will be disappointed in Rosamond's childish behavior. While it may seem the narrator had a premonition about what would eventually occur between the two, in actuality, she has an astute ability to read her subjects along with her tendency to understand their woes. Further ability to relate to her subjects is evident when the narrator says of Rosamond, "I am sorry to add that she was sobbing bitterly, with such abandonment to this relief of an oppressed heart as a woman habitually controlled by pride on her own account and thoughtfulness for others will sometimes allow herself when she feels securely alone" (182). The narrator not only feels sympathy for her characters but also projects this onto her characters so that they too have an overwhelming thoughtfulness for others. She defends the way she portrays characters: "Whatever has been or is to be narrated by me about low people, may be ennobled by being considered a parable; so that if any bad habits and ugly consequences are brought into view, the reader may have the relief of regarding them as not more than figuratively ungentle, and may feel himself virtually in company with persons of some style" (323). Although she shows a sympathy for her characters, she is equally critical of them, referring to Caleb Garth's classification of human employments as "crude" (239) and allowing the reader to see the flaws in Dorothea and Causabon's marriage. In this way, she acts as a close friend who watches her friends' decisions and feels pain on their behalf without being misled to ignore their flaws.

Creating Equality

Besides being sympathetic to the poor, Eliot gives equality regardless of social status. In Eliot's books, there is usually a divide between those who have money and those who do not. In *Middlemarch*, there is a constant need to define a character as either working for money or coming from old money. While offering charity, there tends not to be a connection between members of the two classes. Another Eliot novel *The Mill on the Floss* is unable to bridge the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Jacobus explains: "For all its healing of division, *The Mill on the Floss* uncovers the divide between the language or maxims of the dominant culture and the language itself which undoes them" (Jacobus 68). Unlike those in the world of the novel, the narrator forms a sympathy for and connection to any member of the novel. For instance, in *Middlemarch*, the narrator treats every character with equal respect, regardless of where their money originated. This applies especially to Lydgate, a poor doctor who is also respected for his position in the community. Not only does the narrator spend a large part of Chapters XV and XVI describing him and his past, but she also shows concern for his happiness. She describes his meditations in leaving Mr. Vincy's: "On this ground I fear that many ladies will consider him hardly worthy of their attention" (155). She further defends him to her reader by saying that he at least thought of Rosamond second in his mind as he left the party. Although the narrator shows his nature as a man of science, she emphasizes his ability to care as a way to endear him toward her audience.

As well as relating to characters from any class, Eliot's narrator can relate to characters of various intellectual levels. Eliot's narrator is able to understand characters in many different places in their lives. In an unsigned review of *The Mill on the Floss*, the critic says, "The author describes Maggie Tulliver from her childhood upwards, and traces the influence of all the home

associations on the young girl's mind. Her active mind, her spirit sensitive to all things, her heart with a hunger and thirst to be loved, are analyzed with a wondrous instinctive knowledge of the inner workings of a child's mind" (Carroll 110). Eliot's narrator is fluid enough to shift between developmental stages with Maggie. Additionally, the narrator understands the young Maggie as much as the older Maggie. This begs the question as to the actual age of the narrator—does she mature as Maggie grows? The narrator does not mature and is actually an ageless character that is exceptionally intuitive.

Narrative Personality

The narrators in Eliot further their images as characters themselves as they lend unique personalities to the story and color the perception of the subjects. Eliot's narrator discusses the relationship between sympathy and omniscience. In this sense, the narrator does not know all in *Middlemarch*, but she does know more than the other characters in the novel. Rae Granier explains the way in which the narrator lingers on certain characteristics: "Sympathy repeatedly founders in those characters most narrator-like in their omniscience. Insofar as they come to be or seem omniscient, these characters are unsympathetic, often doubly so in that they cannot successfully give or receive it (from Eliot or from us)" (300). Hence, those who seem to know more in the novel are actually less sensitive to those around them. While the narrator is not omniscient, she does see more than the other characters. However, she retains sympathy for everyone, as evidenced by the reader's empathy for the subjects.

The *Middlemarch* narrator begins with a philosophical approach to life as she opens in the "Prelude." The example of St. Theresa reveals the narrator's intention with the novel. St. Theresa was known as a church reformer and as one of the first two women to be given the papal

honor of Doctor of the Church. This early distinction given to doctors, who were typically male, reveals the reformatory and feminist approach the narrator plans to undertake throughout the story:

Who that cares much to know the history of man, and how the mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time, has not dwelt, at least briefly, on the life of Saint Theresa, has not smiled with some gentleness at the thought of the little girl walking forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors? (Eliot 1)

From the beginning, the narrator pays particular attention to a woman with exceptional qualities. She prepares the reader to compare Dorothea to a saint. The narrator also reveals a tendency to focus on a female character.

The *Middlemarch* narrator goes on in the “Prelude” to paint a picture of the saint as a young child so that she becomes an everywoman for the audience:

That child-pilgrimage was a fit beginning. Theresa’s passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life: what were many volume romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl to her? Her flame quickly burned up that light fuel; and, fed from within, soared after some illimitable satisfaction, some object which would never justify weariness, which would reconcile self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self. She found her epos in the reform of a religious order. (1)

The narrator presents an image of Theresa as a heroic child. Her questions in this passage serve two functions. First, she engages the audience by posing rhetorical questions intended to make them contemplate the life of Theresa. Second, she presents a challenge to the audience as a way

to solidify her ideas. The narrator dares the audience to disagree by asking who would not see the child saint this way, presenting a clear idea of what she would like to portray not only with Theresa, but also with the main characters in *Middlemarch*. Like the initial image of the Saint, the sisters Brooke are both almost childlike the first time they are introduced. They have clear ideals that present the world in black and white terms. Dorothea especially does not allow for any grey to enter her morality. At the same time, like a child, she allows it to bend for specific desires, like the emerald ring and bracelet. Furthermore, Celia claims Dorothea “likes giving up” (14). This sense of self-importance the other characters perceive in her suggests she enjoys her martyrdom and is a child who would like to raise her status by becoming a martyr such as St. Teresa. The presentation of St. Theresa serves to introduce Dorothea as she initially appears, as well as clues the audience into the idea that Dorothea is child-like. The narrator says, “Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action” (1). Throughout the novel, Dorothea attempts to direct change, but she fails through lack of maturity.

The Eliot narrator is at times impudent. There is a distinct sarcasm in her voice when she says,

Indeed, Will had declined to fix on any more precise destination than the entire area of Europe. Genius, he held, is necessarily intolerant of fetters: on the one hand it must have the utmost play for its spontaneity; on the other, it may confidently await those messages from the universe which summon it to its peculiar work, only pacing itself in an attitude of receptivity towards all sublime chances. (Eliot 76)

Yet again, the narrator shows a humor for the subjects, which suggests she is telling a joke with an extremely dry expression on her face. “Mr. Lydgate had the medical accomplishment of looking perfectly grave whatever nonsense was talked to him” (85). Just as Mr. Lydgate, the narrator in *Middlemarch* is extremely dead-pan no matter what nonsense she is speaking.

Granier discusses the ways in which Eliot’s narrator attempts to invoke sympathy in the reader:

Eliot’s overt authorizing of the power of sympathy makes especially germane her attempts at reconciling ethical duty with narrative form. If it is true that Eliot ushers a new seriousness into fiction, holds a mirror (albeit a “defective” one) to nature, and sets her sites on humdrum weavers and shallow rills, she is nonetheless suspicious of realist narratives’ ability...Critics never tire of talking about sympathy in Eliot, but that wealth of talk is disproportionate to the narrow fund of sympathy represented in her novels, especially *Middlemarch*. While the word itself shows up some thirty-odd times in one form or another, successful sympathy...—harmoniously pitched and level-headed—is remarkably hard to come by in that novel. (209-300)

While Eliot discusses the power of sympathy, few characters actually have sympathy for their poorer neighbors. For instance, efforts to reform the policies in the town are not successful. Any change is in fact met with disdain, such as the efforts of the doctor to change the practice of medicine. While a narrator may impose her own sympathy on the reader, she cannot do the same to other characters.

Drawing Connections

The narrator draws connections between themselves and the subjects of their stories. The Eliot narrator in *Middlemarch* projects herself onto the characters by speaking the thoughts she assumes they must be thinking. In Will's case, she presents questions about what his worth is to Dorothea (Eliot 447) and presents arguments about her ability to confide in him unlike her other friends. At the same time, she later criticizes the tendency to judge for one's neighbors. "We judge from our own desires" (495). Thus, while she has the ability to project her own feelings on her characters, she acknowledges the failings that may result from doing this. *Middlemarch* ends with a description similar to St. Theresa at the beginning. She compares the Saint to Dorothea with Dorothea as the person people are more likely to encounter because the reader does not exist in a world where such greatness is possible. "But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know" (794). She further draws the reader into connection with herself by saying the Dorotheas make life better for "you and me" (794). Thus, the narrator even has the power to draw the reader out from reality into the realm of fiction.

Conclusion

Throughout Eliot's *Middlemarch*, the narrator has a strong personality whose voice is not a reflection of the author, but rather she is her own character. She is also a character with omnipotence over the reader as she directs perception. The reader cannot help but become sensitive to the plights of the characters to which the narrator brings attention. As a simultaneous member of the action and member of the audience, the narrator is more involved

than either the audience or the characters. Unlike dramatic irony, the narrative irony created suggests that the narrator is purposely keeping information from the characters and the audience. This control of the gaze gives the audience a sympathy that is directed by the narrator. Thus, Eliot shows the ability of narrators to affect the perception of their readers.

Chapter III

Knowledge is Power: Elizabeth Gaskell's Imperialism

In Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, the exchange of knowledge emphasizes the way in which literacy and education can be used to subjugate people in a colonial world. Due to cultural and class divisions, people are often separated based on access to education. Additionally, Gaskell herself often alludes to works in a way that alters the original author's intention for her own purposes. This is not unlike the theory of Bhabha, which discusses the ways in which knowledge is used to overpower a people. In the novels *North and South* and *Wives and Daughters*, writing is used to bridge divisions similar to the British efforts to impose the English language and education on other cultures as they imperialized the rest of the world. The exchange of knowledge, whether willingly or unwillingly, within the novel is a metafictional element that highlights the way in which a writer passes knowledge onto a reader.

North and South tells the story of Margaret Hale, the daughter of a southern country pastor. In a sudden change of vocation, Mr. Hale decides to leave his parish and become a tutor in the industrial north. Margaret initially despises the northern culture and people. However, she eventually develops feelings for a self-made factory owner, Mr. Thornton. After Margaret inherits a large amount of money from one of her father's friends, she marries Mr. Thornton. The novel is filled with Margaret's own disdain and prejudice against those in the North. This prejudice is repeatedly shown to be unjustified, especially as those in the North become increasingly better educated.

Wives and Daughters tells the story of Molly Gibson, a motherless young girl who lives with her father. Her father eventually remarries Clare, who has a daughter named Cynthia. The relationships between the three women occupy the majority of the novel. The novel remains

unfinished as Gaskell was working on it at the time of her death. However, it is implied that Molly will eventually marry Roger Hamley, to whom Cynthia was originally engaged. Roger's exploration is one example of colonialism at the time. Additionally, throughout the novel, education serves to help the middle class maintain their class while not advancing.

Gaskell's novels are an example of the way one culture's knowledge may be used to subjugate other cultures. The appropriation of one society by another is also reflected in Gaskell's use of other novelists' work. Finally, Gaskell's work reflects the way education can help one group come to control another.

North and South

In Gaskell's *North and South*, literacy and the trading of books is used to bridge the cultural divide between the Northerners and the Southerners. Southerners in the novel value books while Northerners value physical skills. Gaskell's narrator shares the Southern point of view by praising literacy and intellectual pursuits over manual labor throughout the entire book. Another difference between the areas is the North's value of those who have worked their way up to a prominent position as opposed to those who are born wealthy. Hard work in the North is valued over gentility and education. While Margaret's father was respected as an educated clergyman in the South, he is ignored in the town of Milton in the North. For instance, although the landlord initially refuses to change the wallpaper in Hales' new home, it is immediately replaced at Mr. Thornton's request. Mr. Thornton as a factory owner has more authority than any gentleman, especially a poor one. Perhaps if Mr. Hale were still with the church he would have been respected because the only book that holds the members of Milton society is the Bible. While the workers have no use for literature, they are all deeply religious. For instance, Bessy

deals with her illness through her faith in the Bible's words. In Mrs. Thornton's parlor, the only book found is Matthew Henry's Bible. While Mrs. Thornton has moved to a high place in society, she came from humble beginnings. The scarcity of books other than the Bible suggests that literature is harder for people to appreciate if they were not born within a certain class.

When the Hales enter the unfamiliar Northern society, it is similar to the "civilized" British Empire entering colonies in India or Africa. In 1813, Britain passed the Charter Act, renewing the East India Company's charter for twenty years. Gauri Viswanathan says this created two major changes: responsibility toward native education and relaxation of control over missionary efforts (Viswanathan 23). These efforts directed toward educating English colonies are mimicked in the North in *North and South*. There is a similar sense of superiority about the invaders that stems from their superior knowledge and customs. Additionally, Mr. Hale is there to educate the industrial population and thus make them an appropriate part of the Empire.

The North and South come together through Margaret and Thornton. They represent a joining of the two societies of England. Nathaniel says of Milton, "North and South has both met and made kind o' friends in this big smoky place" (*North and South* 73). Generally, the joining cannot happen without a subjugation of one side's views. While Thornton represents the North, he represents an attitude in which literacy is not as highly valued. He may only join with Margaret, the South, when he makes an effort to improve his reading. This requires surrendering some of the Northern attitude about education. Thus, the two are brought together increasingly in scenes of reading. For instance, the reason they meet at all is because Mr. Hale is Thornton's tutor. As Thornton becomes a better reader, Margaret and he get closer just as Cathy and Hareton bonded in *Wuthering Heights*.

The colonies were “civilized” by the British empire through education and domestication. The same occurred in the working class and women. Additional cultural differences exist within the individual homes. As the people of Milton are part of the lower class, more of their values center around survival as opposed to propriety. Thus, they run their homes differently. Women were supposed to serve as the moral center of the home; however, this was more difficult in lower classes with fewer advantages. These women could not serve as protected innocents, but they had to work outside the home. Many women who were not exposed to the harsh industrialized world still faced a life of earning a living as governesses or domestics. As Diana Archibald explains in *Domesticity, Imperialism, and Emigration in the Victorian Novel*:

Key to the Victorian concept of “home,” of course, is this notion of domesticity, and by the 1840s, the domestic ideology of the middle class began to be applied to the working class. If only the working class (which comprised roughly 80 percent of the total population of England) would become “domesticated” (i.e., normalized to dominant domestic practices), the logic ran, then many of England’s problems could be solved. (26)

Margaret experiences both the industrial world and domestic world as she helps keep her family afloat. She takes on more of the housework when her family begins to live at a lower station. Just as ambassadors who enter a new society sacrifice what they consider to be comfort, Margaret must go from living as one of upper society with her aunt and cousin to living with very little.

The Hales continue to adapt to the new culture as they spend less time as a family unit. Archibald remarks that in industrial society, families were separated in the factories in which they spent the majority of their time and usually only slept together. This was a great change

from the ideal family structure the Victorians promoted. Even those in the upper class, like the Thorntons, do not show the ideal family. Because Mrs. Thornton has come up in society, she has difficulty adjusting to a life of inactivity. In this industrial society, it is almost impossible for the “civilized” ideal to persist. Archibald explains:

Jean and John L. Comaroff argue that the effort to domesticate that part of the city which had “previously eluded bourgeois control” was contiguous with British imperialist efforts to “cultivate the ‘savage’ ” in Africa. In this sense, then, many reformers used domestic ideology to attempt to tame any unruly force—be it lower-class, white, English city dwellers or heathen natives residing in lands under British Imperial control. (26)

Mr. Hale’s mission in coming to the North is to educate, and thus civilize, the Northern natives. While it may come across as self-sacrificing in the same way missionary work to Africa appears, it is actually an unbidden assistance.

Knowledge distinguishes the hierarchy of class

Class is distinguished throughout Gaskell’s work by literacy and value of books. In general, those with access to education and literature are likewise members of the upper class. This causes a separation of the classes that may only be mended through an enforcing of one class’s values on the other class. For instance, in *North and South*, Margaret and Thornton are divided because she was born into the upper class and he worked his way up in society. Although the Hales are poorer once they move to the North, they are still considered upper class because they are educated and have good breeding. They stand out from the rest of society in their appearance and manners. For instance, Margaret is described as having a “tall, finely made

figure” (*North and South*, 11) and a face that is “too dignified and reserved for one so young” (18). She is regal and as such evokes images of queens with stately ways. With such a disposition, Margaret is often mistaken for looking down upon those who have wealth without breeding or work for a middle class lifestyle. She does in fact speak negatively of “shoppy” people. Margaret says she only admires people with occupations that involve land or “the three learned professions” (20). She can only respect those who work for a living if their work involves a specific education, such as a lawyer. Margaret further despises the lower class by scorning the idea that they could ever admire reading as she does. “A private tutor!...What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature or the accomplishments of a gentleman?” (41). Not only does she look down on the lower class for their lack of education, but she also belittles them for their lack of ambition.

Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1851) also deals with destroying the prejudice the upper class associates with poorer individuals in society. The novel tells the story of the members of the town of Cranford. Deidre David explains the instance in *Cranford*, in which a poorer individual is likewise used to invoke reader sympathy.

As an instance of how thoroughly imperialism begins to penetrate the imagination of the Victorian novelist, consider the moment in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1853) – that most domestic of English domestic fictions – when a minor character, the washerwoman wife of a former sergeant in the 31st regiment of the East India Company army, relates a touching narrative to the ladies of Cranford of how she walked to Calcutta to get her one surviving child back to England. (David 87)

In this way, she has allowed those in the margins of society to come to power through a text.

In *Cranford*, Gaskell captures literature and satirizes, as opposed to praising. Once again, she appropriates other authors' work and re-invents it for her own purposes. For instance, as Mr. Holbrook shows the cows to the narrator, he quotes Shakespeare and George Herbert (35). He also discusses Goethe, but he enunciates the name as it is spelled instead of using the Germanic pronunciation. Holbrook is compared to Don Quixote, who attempted to be a grander person than he was. Firstly, Gaskell uses literary references to describe her characters, thus redefining original creations. Secondly, she uses great works in a ridiculous setting. By discussing Shakespeare in front of cows, Gaskell brings his greatness down to a common, basic level. In this way, the simplest person can understand it. While literature may be used to oppress, it may also be the great equalizer.

Harsh conditions led to unrest in the North. Because English colonies were continents away, they could often be ignored. However, the North is an ever-present part of the country. Gaskell gives Nathaniel, a poor factory worker in the North, and his family great attention and sympathy. Furthermore, a poor preacher's daughter like Margaret would not usually be noteworthy. As the principle character within the novel, she is able to find a voice and strength. For instance, it is within a novel that she can save the hero from an angry mob. As Archibald discusses:

By allowing sympathetic characters a strong voice of dissent, by constructing a world of suffering caused by an exploitative economic system, by shattering the last remnants of an idealized agrarian realm, Gaskell permits a much more radical critique of ideology to emerge than was consistent with her own acknowledged beliefs. (29)

Thus, through the novel, Gaskell creates empowerment that comes from belonging to the outskirts of an empire as a woman or as a member of the lower class, or both.

There is discrimination in the North as Deidre David discusses the subtle racism that also exists in the North. The Victorians had many derogatory terms for members of their African colonies. They also had offensive terms for the Irish and Irish immigrants. They often referred to them as “white chimpanzees,” stripping them of their humanity. David discusses the way in which this racism occurs in *North and South*:

Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1854) elaborates, albeit briefly, the crude racism excoriated by Carlyle. The Boucher family is doomed by virtue of an inherited Irish melancholia: the father kills himself and the mother lapses into morbid self-pity. As Margaret Hale, Gaskell’s sensible and sensitive heroine, says to her father, Boucher lacked the conventional granite of the Anglo Saxon “northern people” – probably because of his “Irish blood” (p. 308). (91)

The Boucher family is seen as less-than-human. Thus, they are incapable of learning. It is significant that while Nathaniel proves he is a wise leader during the rebellion, there is not an effort to educate him. Nathaniel is so naïve that he cannot be changed.

Margaret’s love of reading is inherited with her genteel blood. Her father is also a great reader. The similarities between the two are reinforced by the roles of the sexes being continuously crossed during the novel. Margaret’s mother does not enjoy reading. On the other hand, Margaret had difficulty going to Helstone for her holidays, as she was limited in the number of books she could bring. Margaret is also portrayed as a more masculine female character. For instance, in the chaos surrounding Edith’s wedding, she is skeptical of the feminine activities. “I wonder if a marriage must always be preceded by what you call a

whirlwind...But are all these necessary troubles?” (*North and South* 12-13). While most of the women are excited to deal with the details of the wedding and look at Indian shawls, Margaret would rather ignore the fuss.

Most importantly, Margaret is distinguished from the other members of her sex by having a desire for knowledge and literature. She has intelligent conversations, which are reflected through her physiognomy. Not only is her face reserved and dignified, suggesting she is thoughtful and less prone to idle amusements than her peers, but her appearance also indicates intelligence. She looks more like her father than her mother. “Her mouth was wide; no rosebud that could only open just enough to let out a ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ and ‘an’t please you, sir”” (18). Margaret’s appearance suggests that she will not be meek, but have much to say. Her physical appearance distinctly represents her love of words. Margaret undermines her education as a woman by connecting to the male world of education. Men of the highest class were the first to be educated. Margaret’s deep connection to gentility means she cannot marry into a lower class. She only marries Thornton after he has worked to adopt the traits of her higher class. Finally, Margaret has joined a more masculine world by taking on the intellectual pursuits of her father. She has entered a distinctly masculine environment while she is distinctly feminine.

Wives and Daughters

In Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*, books cannot be freely enjoyed by the middle class unless there is a connection to the upper class. Like Margaret, Molly also has a great aptitude for learning and an infatuation with books. However, Molly’s father limits the books she reads in an attempt to keep her satisfied with her social situation. If she is too educated, she will be too good for her society as books and education are directly related to class. Cheryl Wilson says female

reading is “policed and challenged by patriarchal forces” (Wilson 1). Molly’s father serves as a blocking figure to books. In Shakespeare’s work, blocking figures are those who stand in the way of true love and marriage. The use of a figure to keep Molly from books shows the importance of literature to the growth of a person. Perhaps if all Victorian women cultivated a love of reading, their greatest ambition would not be marriage to a wealthy man. This is exemplified when Molly is interrupted from her reading of Walter Scott’s *Bride of Lammermoor* to walk outside with the squire. She “would gladly have stayed indoors to finish it” (*Wives and Daughters*, 72). However, the upper class blocks Molly from her books. Molly does not only prefer inside reading to outdoor exercise, but she also prefers literature to human company. Ironically, class both blocks and provides access to education. Unfortunately, her class limits what she can do with her interests. Assuming Gaskell planned for Molly to enter the upper class with a marriage to Roger, Molly would be free to pursue her interests. However, if she is not conquered by the upper class, she will not be able to spend more time on literary education.

In *Wives and Daughters*, books are also used for the middle class to gain more control. Clare, Molly’s stepmother, uses a book to help Lady Cumnor, her companion, fall asleep: “Mrs. Kirkpatrick had been reading aloud till Lady Cumnor fell asleep, the book rested on her knee, just kept from falling by her hold” (105). Clare has used a book to pacify a member of a higher class. As well as Clare reading to control someone who is of a higher class, the way she rests the book shows a presumed dominance over books. Clare is the only block between the book and the floor. Because being low to the ground is the ultimate degradation, Clare is also the only block between the book staying as a characteristic of the upper class and becoming part of the lower class. Clare keeps the book with her in the middle class. As one who does not appreciate reading and intellectual pursuits, Clare’s possession is selfish. She keeps the book in the middle

and where no other class can reach it. Without access by either polarized class, equality has been created, but it is negative.

Imperialism through intellectual hierarchy

Imperialism involves taking over another nation and imposing new beliefs on the citizens. This often includes English literacy because there is a belief in its superiority. Bhabha discusses, in “Signs Taken for Wonders,” how one culture is imposed on another. For instance, the English language is imposed on different peoples. “The discovery of the English book establishes both a measure of mimesis and a mode of civil authority and order” (*Literary Theory*, 1171). Mimesis refers to mimicry—a perfect copy of reality. The book causes both copying and submission. This refers back to hierarchy in a British imperial context: English and literacy are considered superior to non-English and illiteracy. For people who are already literate in a language other than English, being forced to read both languages is an act of submission. The introduction of English knowledge into an area creates a desire to mimic it. Colonizers gain power as the desire to mimic makes people into followers.

But the institution of the Word in the wilds is also an *Entstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition—the dazzling light of literature sheds only areas of darkness. Still the idea of the English book is presented as universally adequate: like the metaphoric writing of the West, ‘it communicates ‘the immediate vision of the thing freed from the discourse that accompanied it, or even encumbered it. (1169)

The introduction of a new culture also creates confusion as to a people’s identity. It causes complications. These complications also help colonizers to take control of an area.

Throughout *Wives and Daughters*, there is an intellectual hierarchy like the one created in colonies. For instance, Molly's education is limited because she is in the middle class. In addition, the Hamley brothers, Roger and Osborne, are favored based on their abilities in education. Osborne is favored because he reads more and writes creative poetry. Due to his intellectual pursuits, his parents expect him to be successful at university. However, he fails. On the other hand, Roger pursues scientific knowledge. He reads books about science and bees. When Clare criticizes his books for being dull, Roger says that it is possible for a book to be both informative and entertaining. As a student of science, Roger is much more successful at school than his brother. The question presented is whether it is better to have the ability to write creatively or read intelligently. Roger brings his education to the real world as he goes on a scientific expedition. On his travels, Roger will have the opportunity to bring knowledge to fairly isolated locations. In this way, he is undoubtedly the more successful brother, as his pursuits will give him a chance to control new populations with his English knowledge. The infiltration of a society with the knowledge of books gives power to the conqueror.

Appropriation of Writers

Gaskell herself uses books to dominate other writers. She appropriates the works of other authors and uses them for her own purposes. Like an explorer, she enters a story, takes what she wants, and redefines it for her own needs. For instance, in *Wives and Daughters*, Molly's situation appears to be a rewriting of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Gaskell rewrites Jane's childhood so it is happy as opposed to oppressive. Additionally, Molly's situation has many elements of the classic fairytale *Cinderella*. For instance, she loves her father, who is often

absent, and her stepmother does not love her. While fairytales are typically simple short stories, Gaskell has created a realistic portrayal of people with deeply rooted psychological problems.

In *North and South*, the name of the parsonage Helstone is named for Caroline Helstone in *Shirley*. Gaskell may also reference Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) was originally entitled *First Impressions*, and Gaskell named Chapter XI “First Impressions.” Like Austen’s work, the chapter deals with the misunderstandings surrounding the first meeting of Margaret and Thornton. Like Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, both Gaskell’s characters misunderstand one another at first. However, in Gaskell’s version, more of the story takes place from the male character’s perspective. She rewrote the story so the hero had a deeper psychological background. Finally, Gaskell begins each chapter with quotations from poets such as Tennyson, Shelley, and Arnold. The poems serve to introduce the action of the chapter. For instance, Chapter XXVIII “Comfort in Sorrow” begins with a quote from Mrs. Browning: “Ay sooth, we feel too strong in weal, to need Thee on that road; / But woe being come, the soul is dumb, that crieth not on ‘God’” (Gaskell 215). This quote is meant to provide comfort to those who are grieving. It is important that Gaskell uses another writer’s words instead of her own. She seems to suggest that others have said what she has said before, but she will attempt to retell it in an improved way. It is as though Gaskell herself has conquered the other writers in an imperialistic way. She has now imposed her own impressions of their work on their work. Gaskell has subjugated and dominated the poets.

Conclusion

Throughout Gaskell’s work, she addresses social issues such as cultural divides, class problems and imperialism. She shows that knowledge and education are paths of power. Where

this power is wielded, one group will always be dominated. Ironically, Gaskell herself takes over the works of other authors and bends them to her own will. According to Bhabha, this equality through education and language is not necessarily a good thing. Through her work, Gaskell shows that the equality built through reading builds relationships where they could not have stood before gaps of class and culture were eliminated. Finally, by moving those in the margins of society into the main passages of the novel, the lower members of society create reader sympathy and come to power.

Conclusion

British Victorian writers such as the Brontë sisters, Eliot and Gaskell use metafictional elements to show the power and influence books have over their characters, their readers and societal issues. Their physical placement in Brontë novels serves to explain the relationship people have to one another through knowledge. In Eliot's writing, the narrator is a strong, driving force whose control over the reader is a metaphor for the influence of writers. Gaskell's writing shows the power knowledge has over society and the way books address important social issues. Overall, Victorian female writing helped women gain influence in a traditionally male-dominated world.

The Brontë sisters show the various ways in which a book may be physically present in a novel to represent the comfort they likely found in reading. Their characters hide their emotions in books and diaries. While this may mean the misuse of books causes great pain, they can also be the source of relationships. When these relationships take the form of a female reading community, there is an empowering of its members. This is not unlike the community of writers the Brontë sisters formed. Like their characters, the assertion of their voices gave them influence in their society. The physical books and scenes of reading are thus a representation of the power the Brontës gained reading books.

Eliot's narrator in *Middlemarch* has a strong presence as a character in her own right. She displays omnipotence over the reader. The reader sympathizes with the same characters as the narrator, because the narrator's voice is constantly in the reader's ear, influencing the reader's emotions. The narrator is also a reflection of the ability of the writer to change public opinions. The strong assertion of the narrator shows the strong voice of storytellers generally.

Gaskell's *North and South* and *Wives and Daughters* are a reflection of the power of the

educated over the non-educated according to the standards of the controlling society. In Gaskell's work, those who remain in power must also be well read. Finally, Gaskell, as well as the Brontës and Eliot, references other writers while manipulating their writing for her own purposes. Gaskell uses it in many cases to reveal the prejudices in Britain. Essayists in turn manipulate her original purpose to prove an argument. This overall appropriation shows the strength of the novelists' voice.

Most writers begin as readers. As they mature while reading, they understand the great impact a well-written piece of fiction can have on a person's life. The use of metafiction alongside power struggles within novels addresses the influence writing has over individuals and society as a whole. Just like all writers, female writers in the Victorian period used writing to assert their voices. Because metafiction typically points to the artificiality of a novel, its presence in the writings of the Brontës, Eliot, and Gaskell, serves as a reminder of the power they have gained through publication. The influence of their female voices is further emphasized by the connection between metafictional elements and female characters. While metafiction empowers women characters within the novels, it serves as a reminder of the power of the woman writer.

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