Framing the Female Narrative: Male Audiences and Women's Storytelling Within Two Brontë Novels

Sammy Murphy
William & Mary

Recommended Citation

Framing the Female Narrative: Male Audiences and
Women's Storytelling Within Two Brontë Novels

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts / Science in Department from
William & Mary

by

Samantha Murphy

Accepted for ___Honors___

(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

_____
Deborah Morse, Director

_____
Kim Wheatley

_____
Suzanne Raitt
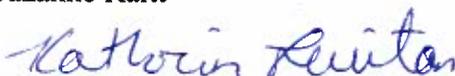
_____
Kathrin Levitan

Williamsburg, VA
May 10, 2022

Framing the Female Narrative: Male Audiences and Women's Storytelling Within Two Brontë Novels

Samantha Murphy
Deborah Morse
22 April, 2022

In dedication to Virginia and Charles O'Brien: thank-you for reading to me tirelessly

before I could do it myself.

Table of Contents:

"I have it now before me; and though you could not, of course, peruse it with half the interest I did, I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents and you shall have the whole save, perhaps, a few passages here and there of merely temporal interest to the writer, or such as would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate. It begins somewhat abruptly, thus–but we will reserve its commencement for another chapter, and call it…"

-*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Chapter 15[1]

After narrating the first 15 chapters of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*[2], Gilbert Markham disappears. His sudden absence may come as a shock to the average reader. For chapter upon chapter, they have learned of Gilbert's life as a prosperous middle-class farmer and borne witness to his attempts at courting the mysterious Helen, an artist and single mother living at the rundown Wildfell Hall estate in his village. The previous narrative structure—-that of a letter between Gilbert Markham and his close male friend Jack Halford--likely feels familiar, as might the sights and sounds of Linden-Car.

However, just as Gilbert's letter to Halford reaches a climactic point, Brontë jerks it away with little more than a single paragraph as warning. In his brief comment (cited above in the epigraph), Gilbert announces the temporary end to his direct narration. A new narrative different in focus, content, and style takes its place. After primarily learning about the elusive Helen through guarded conversations and village gossip, the reader suddenly finds themself in Gilbert's transcription of her diary.[3] Here, Helen narrates both the devastating effects of her marriage to

---

[1] Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. by S. Davies (London: Penguin Random House UK, 1996), 8. From this point onward, in-text citations will be written as follows: (*Tenant, #*).

[2] From here on abbreviated as *Tenant.*

[3] Worth noting is that Gilbert originally transcribes her diary into his journal. He is working off of that transcription in his letter correspondences with Halford. The specific circumstances surrounding the reading of her diary will be discussed later in my thesis.

the malignant, brutish Huntingdon and the means by which she eventually escapes him. It is her backstory laid bare on the page for the benefit of both Gilbert and, via his narration, the reader as well. As Gilbert starts to read the diary within his own narration, so too does the reader. It is only after relaying Helen's diary, and later her letters, that he returns as narrator of his own story. In doing so, Brontë utilizes a particular narrative structure in which she situates one narrative (Gilbert's) outside of or around a second, inner narrative (Helen's).

A similar narrative structure appears within Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), which was published in the year before *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848).[4] Within the text, Emily Brontë begins with the London gentleman Lockwood, tenant of Thrushcross Grange, as narrator. Unlike Gilbert, who is a Yorkshire farmer, Lockwood is a man of leisure from the south of England, making him an outsider to the wild northern moors in which Brontë sets the novel. Throughout the first few chapters, the reader grows comfortable with his narration, which is written in the style of the diary. As one might then expect, much of his narration specifically consists of his personal encounters and experiences, especially those involving members of the Heathcliff household at Wuthering Heights. Key characters to consider in this household are Heathcliff, the late Hindley Earnshaw's son Hareton, and Heathcliff's widowed daughter-in-law Catherine Linton (from here on referred to as Cathy II).

Lockwood's narration often fixates upon Cathy II in particular. Throughout the text, Lockwood's narrative gaze attempts to reframe Cathy II as the object of his desire–albeit not to any ultimate success. Nonetheless, in attempting to learn more of Cathy II's backstory, Lockwood eventually consults the novel's other narrator: the housekeeper Nelly Dean.[5] As was

---

[4] As was common in publishing during the era, both were published in volumes.
[5] It is worth noting that Nelly's inner frame briefly features the voices of both Zillah who, like Nelly, is a servant and Isabella Linton.

the case in *Tenant*, Nelly's story quickly takes center stage. A former servant of the Earnshaw family at Wuthering Heights, Nelly tells the story orally to Lockwood, who records it in his diary. In the style of folk tradition,[6] Nelly relays backstories for several characters central to the history of the Wuthering Heights household, including Heathcliff and the now deceased Catherine Earnshaw (from here on referred to as Cathy I). While Nelly tells her story, Lockwood only reappears to make the occasional interjection. The result is a layered text in which Brontë moves from diary to oral tale and back again. As with *Tenant*, the resulting text situates its two main narratives as inner and outer relative to one another.

In doing so, both *Wuthering Heights* and *Tenant* employ a particular narrative device often referred to as the nested or frame narrative.[7] As might be suggested by the name, frame narratives are, at their most simple, stories within stories prevalent in storytelling traditions across the globe. [8] Frame narratives and narrators were fairly common to 18th and 19th century British literature of the gothic and gothic-romantic traditions, with authors of renown such as Horace Walpole (*The Castle of Otranto*, 1764*)*,[9] Ann Radcliffe (*A Sicilian Romance,* 1790), and Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein,* 1818) notably employing them in their works.

The framed narratives of both *Wuthering Heights* and *Tenant* have attracted both scholarly and critical attention since the 1840s. Notably, at the time of publication, some portion

---

[6] For further analysis of Folk Tradition as it relates to *Wuthering Heights*, consult the works of Nancy Armstrong and Paula M. Krebs.

[7] From this point onward, I will solely use the term frame narrative. This is in line with the emphasis on perception placed by Werner Wolf and Walter Bernart in their work *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media.* I have also chosen this term so as to stay consistent with scholarship, which uses "frame narrative" most frequently.

[8] The Oxford dictionary defines the frame story, which they cite under their frame narrative entry in lieu of a definition, as a "a story which serves as a framework within which a number of other stories are told"; *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "frame story." www.oed.com/view/Entry/74151; Of the frame narrative's prevalence, William Nelles writes "the structural device of the 'story within a story," variously labeled 'frame,' 'Chinese box,' 'Russian doll,' 'interpolated,' 'nested,' 'boxed,' or 'embedded' narrative, is so widely found in literature of all cultures and periods so as to approach universality"; William Nelles. *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative* (New York: P. Lang, 1997), 1.

[9] Worth noting is that Horace Walpole's text is technically a "found manuscript/document" frame in which there is no outer frame at the end of the text.

of this attention was negative. As opposed to intentional or productive, critics instead viewed it

as the cause of structural awkwardness.[10] This vein of criticism especially applied to *Tenant.*

George Moore, a vocal supporter of Anne's prior novel *Agnes Grey* (1847), [11] lamented the use

of narrative framing. In his review of the novel, Moore specifically complains that "the diary

broke the story in halves" and ruined what would have otherwise been, in his opinion, a beautiful

love story between Helen and Gilbert. [12] Nineteenth-century negative criticism of *Wuthering*

Heights does not so frequently lament its structure, often instead taking issue with the general

"coarseness" "feralness" or "wildness" of the text. Nonetheless, within his comprehensive

overview of "*Wuthering Heights* and the Critics," Melvin R. Watson does note that some

reviewers regarded the narrative structure as "clunky," implying that *Wuthering Heights* faced

criticism in relation to its structure as well.[13]

Time appears to have at least partially vindicated Emily and Anne's choices in narrative

structure and narrators[14]–especially as both complement broader gender dynamics within their

two novels. Currently, both boast an impressive collection of analyses of narrative structure as it

relates to any number of topics. Most of this attention–if not outwardly positive–at the very least

acknowledges an achieved purpose behind the use of a frame narrative within both texts. Critics

have associated the narrative structure of *Wuthering Heights* with a wide range of functional

---

[10] For comprehensive, abbreviated analyses of nineteenth-century criticism, consult works by Melvin R. Watson, Carol Ohmann, and Marianne Thormählen. For the most comprehensive listing of criticism, consult *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* by Miriam Allott.

[11] *Agnes Grey* was published alongside *Wuthering Heights* by Thomas Newby in a three-volume edition (also known as a three decker); Miriam Farris Allott, *The Brontës, the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 106.

[12] George Moore. *Conversations in Ebury Street, by George Moore* (London: Heinemann, 1924), 218.

[13] Melvin R Watson, "'Wuthering Heights' and the Critics," *The Trollopian* 3, no. 4 (1949): 243–63, https://doi.org/10.2307/3044506.

[14] CP Sanger's piece "The Structure of *Wuthering Heights*" is amongst the first analyses to seriously consider the structure of either text within a scholarly context. Refer back to it for a formative analysis of the frame narrative as it relates to the novel.

purposes, including embodiment of the failure of interpretation, literary simulacrums, and a male gaze.[15] With respect to *Tenant*, scholarship has related narrative structure to art criticism, the subversion of the public/private spheres, and etc.[16]

Within my thesis, I too identify a focus to Anne and Emily's respective uses of the framed narrative: that of men engaging with female stories and storytellers. Through their narrators, Anne and Emily do not simply embody a dualism between inner/outer; both sisters also simultaneously embody both a tension and an encounter between male/female. In *Tenant*, Helen's diary, which takes up the middle two thirds of the novel, is clearly feminized: it not only belongs to a woman but also recounts a very gendered experience with marital abuse. In contrast, the diary's initial reader Gilbert comes across as distinctly masculine in initial employment, upbringing, and romantic pursuits.[17] Likewise, Nelly's oral narration is distinctly female[18] relative to that of Lockwood the gentleman, whose narrative gaze is masculine in focus.[19]

As a result, the texts model for readers active male engagement with female storytelling, transforming their inner frames into written or verbal texts and outer frame narrators into distinctly male audience members. Through this, we see Gilbert and Lockwood respectively engage both female "text" and female storyteller. In the case of *Tenant*, this interaction involves

---

[15] Consider works by Nicholas Frangipane (literary simulacrums), Beth Newman (male gaze), and Carol Jacobs (interpretation).

[16] See works by Joseph Kanwit (art criticism) and Rachel Carnell (public/private spheres). For other analyses of narrative structure in *Tenant's* structure, consult Carol Senf, N.M. Jacobs, Elizabeth Langland, Catherine Quirk, and Russell Poole.

[17] Some arguments, many of which will be covered in my overview of *Tenant*, emphasize the framing more than the centering of Helen's text. Although my thesis places particular emphasis upon the importance of being present and voiced, I still prioritize an interpretation of Helen's text as central rather than embedded or buried.

[18] According to Paula M. Krebs, the oral nature of her narrative connects back to a tradition of "old wives tales" that feminizes the style and content of Nelly's narrative relative to Lockwood. In contrast, Lockwood embodies to Krebs a sort of "gentleman" folklorist; Paula M Krebs, "Folklore, Fear, and the Feminine: Ghosts and Old Wives' Tales in '*Wuthering Heights*,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26, no. 1 (1998), 41–52, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058402.

[19] See Beth Newman's work, which I cover later in my thesis, for a comprehensive analysis of the masculine component to Lockwood's gaze.

reading a written text, Helen's diary and then letters to her brother Frederick Lawrence. In the case of *Wuthering Heights*, this interaction consists of listening to an orally delivered story of the folkloric tradition. Throughout both, the juxtaposition between an outer and inner frame simulates a relationship between male audience and female storyteller for the reader.

This particular function aligns well with the pre-established capabilities of literary frames. Holistically, scholars tend to recognize an almost paradoxical quality to the narrative frame, with some emphasizing the idea of boundary and others the idea of bridge. John Frow's work in particular highlights the existence of frames as boundaries. When discussing the literary frame, he specifically notes that "the frame can be anything that acts as a sign of qualitative difference, a sign of the boundary between a marked and an unmarked space."[20] And yet, frame narratives can also function as bridges that make a text's inner contents more approachable. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart, in their analysis of "framing borders," note that frames not only mark the "inside/outside border" but also aid in interpretation by "creating a 'bridge' between its inside and its outside or context."[21] This observation holds true within analyses of specific types of literature. With respect to frame tales that feature an oral inner frame, scholar Bonnie Irwin writes "in a frame tale, the writer creates an audience in the text, providing a bridge between actual oral storytelling traditions and a literate genre that aims to depict those traditions."[22] With respect to the nineteenth-century novel, Nicholas Frangipane makes a similar

---

[20] John Frow, "The Literary Frame," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 16, no. 2 (1982): 20, https://doi.org/10.2307/3332274.
[21] Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart. "Introduction." In *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 30.
[22] Bonnie D. Irwin, "Frame Tales and Oral Tradition," *Oral Tradition* 18, no. 1 (2003): 125, doi:10.1353/ort.2004.0023.

remark, stating that they employ the "mediation" of frame "to make unbelievable stories easier to take."[23]

Some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that the frame narrative can therefore be a tool for 'realism.' Take, for example, Clayton Carlyle Tarr's writing on the gothic frame narrative and realism. According to Tarr, throughout gothic tradition, the frame narrative "suggests a deeper 'reality'" to the text's central narrative.[24] The outer frame often relays the inner frame as if it is more than mere fiction, creating a set of circumstances necessitating its existence in the narrative. This in turn makes the inner frame more "Real."[25] As a result, the reader finds themselves more connected to the contents of the inner frame than they may have initially expected.

Although no doubt an intriguing and inventive approach, the application of the term realism in this context is slightly problematic, especially with respect to Gothic novels in which the inner frames often feature supernatural elements.[26]With this in mind, I instead attribute a different function to the idea of frames as bridges, one more in-line with Wolf, Irwin, and Frangipane's observations. Rather than describing the frame as a tool for realism, I instead envision it as a tool for accessibility. My use of accessibility is informed by a particular definition of accessible: that which refers to a capability "of being approached."[27] In my thesis,

---

[23] Nicholas Frangipane, "Lockwood the Liar: a Call to Reconsider *Wuthering Heights* as a Metafictional Work on the Limits of Narrative," *Brontë Studies: Journal of the Brontë Society* 41, no. 1 (2016): 29, https://doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2015.1123914.

[24] Clayton Carlyle Tarr. *Gothic Stories Within Stories: Frame Narratives and Realism in the Genre, 1790-1900* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2017), 2.

[25] In using "Real," I am referring to Tarr's frequent use of the term, which they in turn borrow from Jacques Lacan's work. Tarr defines the real as referring to "the chaotic welter of pre-symbolic life that dissipates all forms of logic." (see footnote 25 for citation)

[26] Of course, as was mentioned in the previous footnote, the inner reality Tarr discusses is often more psychological or symbolic. Nonetheless, given the implications of the term realism, I still find it problematic even if not intended to refer to literal realism.

[27] *Oxford English Dictionary Online,* s.v. "accessible," www.oed.com/view/Entry/1034

this type of approach is analytical, the outer frame makes certain analyses of the inner frame more possible for a critical audience.

Within *Tenant* and *Wuthering Heights*, this particularly relates to engaging female narratives. In both, the frame narrative makes the inner story and its respective storyteller more accessible. This in turn creates a new avenue for literary analysis: a reader can not only analyze the contents of the inner frame but also how the outer frame narrator interprets these contents. Using the frame narrative then, both Anne and Emily can represent an accessible relationship between male audience and female storyteller that the reader can in turn analyze and relate to any number of themes.

The centrality of men engaging women's storytelling to both texts gains a historical relevance and subversive quality when contextualized by gender dynamics within nineteenth-century literary culture. The three Brontë sisters wrote in the early Victorian period, [28] which began formally with Queen Victoria's accension to the throne in 1837.[29] During this period, literature—the novel in particular--saw a massive rise in popularity and accessibility, due in large part to increases in literacy and improvements in printing technology.[30] Many women benefitted from this growing accessibility and, during the Victorian era, the number of women citing author as their profession sharply increased.[31] Several of these authors took advantage of the growing number of periodicals/journals in regular publication–some of which specifically targeted a

---

[28] Due to the specific focus of this thesis (using frame narratives to interrogate the idea of men engaging female stories), I do not consider Charlotte's work within my central analysis.

[29] Some historians date the start of the era to the year 1832 due to the passing of the first reform bills.

[30] Alexis Easley, "Making a Debut," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 23; Kate Flint, "The Victorian novel and its readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel. 2nd ed*., ed. by (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 144-147; version of the book used is digital, which pay affect pagination.

[31] Alexis Easley, "Gender, Authorship, and the Periodical Press," *The History of British Women's Writing, 1830-1880: Volume Six*., ed. by Lucy Hartley, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41; Alexis Easley, "Making a Debut," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 15.

growing female market.[32] The result was a not insignificant subset of Victorian literature written

by, and often for, women.

However, even with the creation of more space in the industry, publishing's gender

dynamics still grossly favored men. Women authors encountered and navigated an industry filled

with male agents, editors, and critics.[33] Although women were involved in the business of

publishing, the popular assumption was that professionals in publishing would be men.[34]

Networking, which was quite important to the career of any Victorian author, often excluded

women.[35] Publishers often paid female authors less than their male counterparts for a similar

caliber of work and expected them to stay within the confines of genres/novel forms considered

suitably feminine, with one example of this being the domestic novel.[36]

This is partially symptomatic of a Victorian gender ideology that created separate

spheres[37] for men and women. Within her piece on Victorian women and the private sphere,

scholar Anne Digby defines the public sphere as consisting of "paid work and national politics"

---

[32] Flint, Kate, "The Victorian novel and its readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel. 2nd ed*., ed. by (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 133-263; Alexis Easley, "Gender, Authorship, and the Periodical Press," *The History of British Women's Writing, 1830-1880: Volume Six*., ed. by Lucy Hartley, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41-43.

[33] Alexis Easley, "Making a Debut," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 15; Linda Hughes, "The Professional Woman Writer," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1830-1880: Volume Six*, ed. by Lucy Hartley, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 56-57.

[34] Within her analysis of editors in publishing, Beth Palmer specifically notes that even guidebooks for women writers from the period assumed that editors would be men; Beth Palmer, "Assuming the Role of Editor," In *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, edited by Linda H. Peterson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 59.

[35] Alexis Easley, "Making a Debut," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 15-16; Linda H. Peterson, "Working with Publishers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing,* ed. by Linda H. Peterson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 55.

[36] Alexis Easley, "Making a Debut," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 15.

[37] One of the most famous and influential pieces on the ideology of separate spheres is John Ruskin's piece *Sesame and Lilies* (1865).

and the private sphere as consisting of "the female domain of domesticity and the family."[38]

Within her work on *Tenant*[39], Rachel K. Carnell notes that this dichotomy could extend into the

literary realm as well. Of course, the ideology of separate spheres cannot fully capture the reality

of nuanced gender relations during the period–a point that both scholars repeatedly make clear in

the rest of their respective pieces. Carnell specifically notes that a select few "exceptional

women" [40] participated in the artistic and political public spheres of Victorian England. [41]

However, the concept of separate spheres nonetheless was influential within Victorian society.

Public facing matters of opinion or discourse-such as, for example, professional authorship–were

typically associated with men.

    As one might then expect, the idea of professional artistry remained deeply connected to

manhood. Women could produce both written and visual art; however, their products were often

considered "amateur" by default.[42] In fact, as Gaye Tuchman argues, the professionalization of

novel writing during the Victorian era corresponded to a systematic exclusion of women who, in

Tuchman's words, constituted the majority of English novelists at the turn of the nineteenth-

century.[43] Of this transition, she writes that, by the late Victorian era, men had almost completely

"edged" women out of professional authorship. According to Tuchman, as literary culture

---

[38] Anne Digby. "Victorian values and women in public and private." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 78, (1992): 195.

[39] Rachel K Carnell, "Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53, no. 1 (1998): 7, https://doi.org/10.2307/2902968.

[41] In her work, Carnell specifically relates her discussion of exceptional women back to Helen Huntingdon.

[42] See Antonia Losano's work on professional female artists, mainly "The Professionalization of the Female Artist in Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" and *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature.*

[43] See Gaye Tuchman's *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change;*
Gaye Tuchman, and Nina E. Fortin. *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change.* (London: Routledge, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203114353.

expanded during the Victorian Era, the corresponding image of professional author grew increasingly masculine.[44]

When Victorian women did write professionally, it often came with a sense of anxiety. In their seminal work *Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar attribute this anxiety to the patriarchal image of the artist as male. As they write, "the female artist must first struggle against the effects of a socialization which makes conflict with the will of her (male) precursors seem inexpressibly absurd, futile, or even….self-annihilating." This general anxiety often manifested itself in more specific concerns including "the loneliness of the female artist," "feelings of alienation," and a "fear of antagonism of male readers." [45]

Female authors navigated these negative emotions, and the climate behind them, in a modicum of different ways. Some authors took advantage of anonymous periodical publishing in the early Victorian period so as to write without fear of gendered backlash. Others, such as Emily, Anne, and Charlotte Brontë, used male pseudonyms. Many conformed to expectations of the time, sticking with genres considered suitable for both female authors and female readers. *The History of British Women's Writing V.6* attributes these impulses to a general feeling of needing to adapt and conform to male standards for authorship in the early Victorian era.[46] Gilbert and Gubar, however, argue that many authors only conformed superficially and often

---

[44] In reference to nineteenth-century art and literature, Alexandra Wettlaufer writes that both were "focalized through a male subject and addressed to a male audience." It was not just the author that was male—the subject matter and presumed reader also were assumed to be male; pp. 227, Wettlaufer, Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, "Brontë's Portraits of Romantic Resistance: *The Tenant of Wildfell* Hall." In *Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Painting and the Novel in France and Britain, 1800–1860*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011) 227, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16rdd1n.13.

[45] Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Anxieties of Authorship," In *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 235, 238.

[46] Lucy Hartley et al. *The History of British Women's Writing, 1830-1880: Volume Six*. Edited by Jennie Batchelor et al., (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

embedded more subversive elements within their texts. This, in turn, creates a dynamic in which a text may simultaneously conform to and subvert the literary climate.

It is within, and sometimes against, this climate that *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights* center women's storytelling via the framed narrative device. This focus alone begins to hint at the aforementioned subversive quality identified by Gilbert and Gubar within Victorian women's writing. Neither Emily nor Anne centers this relationship coincidentally. As I've been hinting towards, I specifically envision the framed narrative structure as a tool for subversion in both texts. This focus on subversion is also in part inspired by the work of scholars Joseph Kanwit[47] and Paula M. Krebs[48]–both of whom imagine the texts as tools for simulation and subversion. In Kanwit's piece, the simulated subverted subject is male art critics; within Krebs', it is the gentleman, armchair folklorist. Within my analysis, the subverted subject is a patriarchal mode of approaching the female storyteller.

In both texts, our outer frame narrators (Gilbert and Lockwood) initially embody this patriarchal treatment of the female author throughout their initial outer frames. Across the first few chapters of both texts, Emily and Anne note the privilege and seeming authority or confidence of the male reader. They imbue their narrators with a certain self-centeredness that further manifests itself in misunderstandings and attempted subjugations of the female text. At times, this female text is literal; however, at other times, this female text is more figurative and may consist of a woman's body or character. In doing so, Anne and Emily embody an attempted

---

[47] John Paul W Kanwit, "'I have often wished in vain for another's judgment': Ideal Aesthetic Commentary and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, no. 121 (2012): 84 link.gale.com/apps/doc/A288536751/LitRC?u=anon~e177bf97&sid=googleScholar&xid=c2f9d379.
[48] Paula M Krebs, "Folklore, Fear, and the Feminine: Ghosts and Old Wives' Tales in '*Wuthering Heights*,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26, no. 1 (1998): pp. 41–52, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058402.

subjugation or constraint of the female narrative. And yet, this dynamic is primarily external or surface level; it quickly deteriorates as both texts proceed to their respective conclusions.

It is in method of subversion that the novels differ immensely. *Wuthering Heights* primarily focuses on Lockwood's inability to properly approach the female artist and/or female text. In *Tenant*, the reverse is true; Anne Brontë captures an immense transformation within Gilbert's reading that coincides with developing respect towards the female artist. Quite notably, Gilbert's transformation is self-motivated; the female artist need neither force nor coddle him into improved character. The texts also differ in their use of additional male readers. Gilbert/Lockwood are the primary–but not only—male readers. Within *Wuthering Heights,* Hareton serves as a significant male reader whose respectful relationship to reading only highlights Lockwood's ineptitudes. Within *Tenant*, Helen's husband Huntingdon and his friend Hattersley function as important male readers who, through unproductive and productive readings respectively, only highlight potential trajectories for Gilbert's relationship to the text.

Taken together, the texts simulate two different paths for the male audience: stagnation and transformation. Within *Tenant*, Gilbert gradually learns how to properly interact with both Helen and her texts. His gradual distancing from a male-centric gaze heavily involves and relies upon a woman's writing. Within *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood stagnates at the novel's end, failing to properly exert dominion over the female narrative or his surroundings; the text responds to his disrespectful reading by distancing him from the world he so clearly seeks to insert himself into. Through this, *Wuthering Heights*–like *Tenant*–subverts a patriarchal subjugation of both female author and text.

Of course, neither text completely escapes from these patriarchal underpinnings. In both, there is a cost incurred by the female artist, especially those unlucky enough to find themselves

surrounded solely by disrespectful male readers. The female artist's victories, albeit impressive, often come with caveats. This is especially true with respect to *Tenant*, in which Helen's romantic relationship with Gilbert leaves lingering questions regarding his true motivations as reader. Regardless, both texts achieve two main functions: they center male engagement with female narratives and then use these readings to characterize and then subvert a patriarchal in-text male audience–feats at least partially reliant on the frame narrative. Through my analysis of these two functions, I hope to produce a nuanced endorsement of the narrative structure and focus of *Wuthering Heights* and *Tenant.*

Stagnant Stares: Patriarchal Gaze, Female Storytellers, and *Wuthering Heights*

1a: A Brief Introduction

In *Wuthering Heights*, all roads lead back to Lockwood. Or, at least, they do with respect to an analysis of male reading. Even when Lockwood fades to the novel's background, his role as outer narrator keeps him structurally relevant to the text. Lockwood looms even when not directly heard from. From this position of ubiquity, Lockwood delivers a narration that in both structure and style invokes ideas of being audience to a female narrative. Of course, not all audience members are identical, and Lockwood approaches the novel's figurative and literal texts–especially those of women–with a sort of intrusively self-centered gaze. At times, this gaze, described by several scholars as voyeuristic[49], either explicitly or implicitly serves his own perceived male narrative. Notably, this type of readership embodies and harkens back to popular attitudes toward the female artist in that it lessens her priority and perspective relative to that which is masculine. And yet, Brontë does not leave this gaze unchallenged, systematically undermining Lockwood's centrality and confidence throughout the text. Using the frame narrative, Emily creates within *Wuthering Heights* a simulation of male disregard for and attempted dominion over the female text that, when challenged, can function as a tool of empowerment and defiance for female artists.

1.b: Eye of the Beholder: Lockwood as Audience and Reader

Throughout my thesis thus far, I have stated that both the framed narration and scenes contained therein facilitate my analysis. But what actually allows for this connection? A frame

---

[49] See Beth Newman ("The Situation of the Onlooker: Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*"), Catherine Baldrige ("Voyeuristic Rebellion: Lockwood's Dream and the Reader of *Wuthering Heights*"), and Erin Britt's ("Lockwood as Voyeur in *Wuthering Heights*") work for an analysis of the voyeuristic qualities to his gaze.

narrative alone does not necessarily thematically *center* an idea of audience and storyteller. The structural specifics of both the frame narration and Lockwood's narrative voice facilitate an interpretation of Lockwood as active audience to Nelly's oral story. With respect to the frame narrative itself, this engagement centers the image of Lockwood listening to an oral story. Within the particulars of his outer frame, several components to his narrative gaze and background invite a supplementary interpretation of Lockwood as a reader. [50]

The particulars of the framed narrative characterize Lockwood as both a functional and structural audience.[51] The narrative structure, at its most basic, embodies Lockwood encountering, engaging, and interpreting a story. How Brontë establishes the first attribute– actively encountering–is quite simple. The transition from Lockwood's narration into Nelly's is a type of encounter. And yet, it is not just any encounter: it also features a degree of engagement typical of an audience/storyteller relationship. The specifics of the scene in which Lockwood first listens to Nelly's narration make this especially apparent. First and foremost, the encounter between the two narratives coincides with Lockwood and Nelly occupying a shared physical space that emphasizes a connection between them. While Lockwood eats supper, he asks Nelly several leading questions regarding Wuthering Heights's background. In order to do this, he obviously must remain in the same room as her. Likewise, in order to then hear the story, he must remain in this position. The text goes into detail when describing this specific physical

---

[50] By supplementary, I refer to it adding to or strengthening the relationship between audience and female storyteller already forwarded by the frame narrative itself. This in turn allows for a greater centering of the relationship between male audience and female storyteller.

[51] Some scholars have directly labelled this interaction as reading. For example, Carol Oates (when describing the dynamic between Lockwood and reader) notes how we read "his 'reading'" of Nelly's narrative. However, when considering that listening to oral stories (especially those which bear connections to folkloric tradition) is itself a form of engaging narrative, I decided to avoid claiming that it is actual, or even partial, reading; pp. 446, Carol Joyce Oates, "The Magnanimity of '*Wuthering Heights*,'" *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 2 (1982): 446, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343330.

setup. Lockwood sits in the room "crouched" near "the fire" (*Wuthering Heights,* 117).[52]

Notably, his physical condition keeps him bound to this position: Lockwood notes that he is beginning to feel ill; his "head [feels] hot" and "the rest of [him] cool" (*WH,* 117). Given this condition, he likely wouldn't be able to leave the estate even if he wanted to. Nelly is, in turn, seated in a nearby chair, her attention split between her story and sewing work. From this detailed description, the reader can easily imagine the two occupying a physical space together.

Before commencing Nelly's narration, Lockwood underscores this idea of cohabitation one last time in noting that Nelly seems "pleased to find me so companionable" (*WH,* 118). This is his final comment before temporarily ceding his role as narrator to Nelly. Lockwood therefore ends his narration by recognizing the connection (or shared companionship) between the two of them. Overall, these textual details serve a clear purpose: they underscore an idea of Lockwood existing in close proximity to the delivered story. Much as, for example, a reader must sit in the room with their book, Lockwood must sit with Nelly and her narrative in order to receive it. In subsequent interludes to Nelly's narration, Lockwood will continue to note that they occupy the same physical space, which adds a directness to how he engages her story.

The format of the transition further centers this idea of engaging a narrative. Nelly's story begins in the middle of a chapter, a structural choice on Brontë's part that keeps Lockwood connected to the act of listening to Nelly's narrative. The actual textual content further emphasizes this point. Nelly begins her section with the line "before I came to live here…" (*WH,* 118). Almost immediately, however, Lockwood reappears to note that "she commenced–waiting no further invitation to her story" (*WH,* 118). Once again, we see in this moment a connection

---

[52] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003); Digital, meaning pagination in citations differs from a print copy; from this point onward, all in-text citations are written in following style: (*WH, #).*

between Nelly's narration and Lockwood. Although rarely vocal, his gaze remains relevant. Nelly's text is not isolated; an in-text gaze (his gaze) remains present. In maintaining the proximity of this gaze, Brontë not only simulates an act of active engagement but also centers it. Had the formatting maintained more separation between their voices, this dynamic may not have been quite so central or obvious.

Beyond simply facilitating or representing an encounter, Lockwood's commentary often interprets the inner frame. Either at the ends or beginnings of chapters, Lockwood will frequently include direct mention of his own opinion on Nelly's narration. Sometimes, this opinion might be stylistic. For example, at the beginning of chapter nine, Lockwood remarks that Nelly "is, on the whole, a very fair narrator, and I don't think I could improve her style" (*WH,* 546).[53] At other times, this interpretation responds to the actual content of the text. For example, Lockwood comments poorly on Cathy I's character after first hearing of her backstory from Nelly. Scholarship has interpreted this commentary in a number of ways[54]–some of which, although intriguing, are not directly related to my analysis. For now, it remains most prudent to imagine these comments as snapshots of audience interpretation. It is almost as if, by nature of the narrative being framed, the text captures the inner monologue of an audience.

How Lockwood characterizes himself within this narration also encourages an analysis of him as audience to a narrative. Here, his type of "audienceship" draws parallels with reading. With respect to his narrative voice, this connection with reading is not literal. It arises from,

---

[53] In response to this particular comment, Frangipane envisions the inner frame as a sort of simulacrum that introduces questions of Lockwood's general credibility (i.e.he implies that Lockwood may have invented the whole tale). However, when considering Lockwood's direct admission that he changes little due to liking her general tone and style, I instead view this comment as a mere instance of editorial commentary rather than a sign of large-scale artifice; Nicholas Frangipane, "Lockwood the Liar: a Call to Reconsider *Wuthering Heights* as a Metafictional Work on the Limits of Narrative," *Brontë Studies* 41, no. 1 (2016): 29-38, DOI: 10.1080/14748932.2015.1123914
[54] Perhaps most memorable or distinctive of these analyses is Frangipane's reimagining of the text as a sort of literary simulacrum facilitated by the frame narrative. (See footnote 53 for citation).

rather, a mindset of reading. The specifics of Lockwood's narrative voice, at least those important to an understanding of him as a reader, appear from the novel's very first paragraph. More specifically, within this short section, we see Lockwood establish one particularly important characteristic that forms the basis of his tendency to "read" his surroundings: he is an outsider to the Yorkshire moors.

The first three lines make his visitor (i.e. outsider) status readily apparent. He begins by noting a "visit to [his] landlord" (*WH,* 4). The implication here is that he's a tenant, which immediately precludes him from likely being in the area due to familial ancestral property or a deep connection to the land. In the following clause, he adds "the solitary neighbour [sic] that I shall be troubled with" when referring to Heathcliff (*WH,* 4). The phrasing here, more specifically the use of future tense, speaks to an anticipated rather pre-existing relationship, suggesting all the more that Lockwood is new to the area. His subsequent comment--"This is certainly a beautiful country!"--reads almost like a tourist's (*WH,* 4). It's complimentary–but in a manner that establishes distance between Lockwood and his surroundings. Lockwood's subsequent remark that "in all of England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society" leans into this idea (*WH,* 4). Notice here his use of "society." Within it, we see perhaps a slight reference to his general worldliness and status. He is frustrated with the hubbub of society but also nonetheless of a background that makes him privy to it. In his own opinion, he is far removed in background and geographic home from the inhabitants of the moors. His status as an outsider only serves to emphasize that he's technically an audience to the central stories of the text, which creates an effect of him seeming "outside of the fictional realm."[55] This is similar to how any reader is technically exterior to the world they

---

[55] p. 53; Carol Jacobs. "*Wuthering Heights*: At the Threshold of Interpretation." *Boundary 2* 7, no. 3 (1979): 53 https://doi.org/10.2307/303164

read about. Even if their text is nonfictional, the world it contains is still constructed and therefore separated from them. As such, Lockwood's position as "outsider" relative to most other characters in the text parallels the role of a reader.

These parallels connect back to the escapist reading habits of the Victorians. Kate Flint, for example, touches upon this escapist impulse within her work on travel reading. More specifically, within her chapter contribution to the *Feeling of Reading*, Kate Flint writes of "defensive" travel reading. According to Flint, Victorians, when traveling, sought out the familiar via literature[56]. We see an offshoot of this idea at play in Lockwood's outsider status. As an outsider, Lockwood frequently attempts to interpret his surroundings. In the context, we might consider his attempts at interpretation as a type of defensive reading. He uses the familiar (i.e. his own background and experiences) in order to "read" and perhaps even rewrite his new surroundings.

His status as an outsider who must "read" and interpret his surroundings comes alongside a general intrusiveness also apparent early on within the novel. [57] It is through this particular characteristic that Brontë lays the groundwork for Lockwood's approach to female text. Consider, for example, his description of Heathcliff, which also appears in the novel's first paragraph. Despite barely knowing the man, Lockwood includes all sorts of presumptions about his character. These descriptions are quite overbearing, a fact made evident by Heathcliff's withdrawn physicality. A note regarding Heathcliff's fingers "shelter[ing] themselves" only makes more evident how boldly and aggressively Lockwood's gaze seeks to know him (*WH*, 5).

---

[56] Kate Flint. "Travel Reading." In *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience & Victorian Literature*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

[57] Both Cate Baldrige and Beth Newman have specifically related this intrusiveness in particular back to their analyses of voyeurism. Baldrige specifically associates this intrusive gaze with a sort of "voyeur of social rebellion"; Cate Baldrige, "Voyeuristic Rebellion: Lockwood's Dream and the Reader of '*Wuthering Heights*,'" *Studies in the Novel* 20, no. 3 (1988): 274–87, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29532580.

Furthermore, in interpreting Heathcliff, Lockwood repeatedly relates his perception of the man back to himself.[58] Although Heathcliff and Lockwood are quite different characters in surface personality, Lockwood still somehow manages to connect his perception of Heathcliff back to himself. This tendency only adds to the intrusiveness of Lockwood's gaze.

1.c: Of Books and Bodies: Lockwood as Figurative and Literal Reader of Female Texts

In the case of this specific interaction with Heathcliff, Lockwood directs his gaze towards a man. However, on several occasions, Lockwood directs his intrusive gaze towards the female figure or body. In his reading of the female body as figurative text, we anticipate how he will approach more literal female texts later in the novel. As an example, let us consider his initial reaction to seeing Cathy II. Immediately, this scene harkens back to an idea of Lockwood uninvitedly perceiving those around him. He begins by noting that, previously, "her position was sheltered from the light" (*WH,* 32). Once again, we see Brontë use the word "shelter." Through re-invoking this language, Brontë conjures an image of her almost hiding from his gaze, which nonetheless eventually reaches her. As was the case with his description of Heathcliff, we see in this short remark an idea of intrusiveness, a sense of Lockwood inserting his gaze onto the lives of those around him. Unlike his description of Heathcliff, however, Lockwood's subsequent remarks play heavily into a patriarchal and sexual reframing of Cathy II as an "object of desire."[59]

---

[58] See, for example, his profession that the two are a "suitable pair," p. 4

[59] Beth Newman, within her analysis of Lockwood's gaze, frequently uses this term so as to refer to its reframing of Cathy II; Beth Newman. "'The Situation of the Looker-On': Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights,*" *PMLA* 105, no. 5 (1990): 1029–41, https://doi.org/10.2307/462732.

A sort of voyeuristic heterosexual desire underlies his description of Cathy II. From his uninvited position as "onlooker,"[60] Lockwood notes his "distinct view of her whole figure and countenance" (*WH*, 32). He takes in her "exquisite little face" and "slender form"--all the while including alongside these descriptions little remarks regarding his opinion on her age and desirability (*WH*, 32). As was the case with Heathcliff, Lockwood centers himself in his voyeurism–it is a self-centered intrusiveness. As one might then expect, his description of her physical form culminates in a remark regarding her attractiveness to him. Her lack of "agreeable" expression connects back to an (in)ability for his "susceptible heart" to desire her (*WH*, 32). Through his gaze, Lockwood centers himself in a manner that reduces Cathy II to a consumable and sexualized object. In subsequent scenes, even some contained in the very same chapter, Lockwood will continuously perceive Cathy II within this framework. This is done in the complete absence of Cathy II ever mentioning an attraction to Lockwood. In his perceptions of her, Lockwood at least attempts to exert a sort of narrative dominion over her, "reading" into her body a gendered future of potential courtship and desire she has neither explicitly nor implicitly consented to.

When perceiving characters—especially those who are female—Lockwood resists reciprocity in a manner that further underscores his general desire for dominion. For example, within the novel's first chapter, Lockwood recounts a prior courtship episode involving a young woman. Here, he notes that he viewed her as a "goddess" only so "long as she took no notice of [him]" (*WH*, 15). As soon as she expresses autonomy and "look[s] a return," Lockwood shrinks "icily into [himself]" and loses interest (*WH*, 15). In this short comment, we see Lockwood respond to a woman's gaze, more specifically one that reciprocates his own, with revulsion. This

---

[60] One of the first scholars to characterize Lockwood as an "onlooker" is likewise also Beth Newman.

same revulsion extends into his interactions with Cathy II. The sharpness of Cathy II's gaze disturbs him; she frequently interrupts his attempts at perceiving her by perceiving him back—and not in a manner implied to be flattering.[61] It is in fact because of this gaze that Lockwood is conflicted about whether he initially desires her. Beth Newman, in her analysis of gaze and gender within *Wuthering Heights*, writes that these interactions create a "psychic structure whereby a woman who 'looks a return' at a man threatens to immobilize him."[62] Lockwood wants to maintain control over how he perceives the "narratives" of others and, as such, does not desire reciprocity in narrative perception or power.

Initially, Brontë appears to embody this idea of male dominion within her portrayal of Lockwood as a literal reader and, within his interactions with Nelly, engaged audience. The first instance of actual reading appears only a few pages after Lockwood's initial run-in with Cathy II. Coincidentally, this first text is the childhood diary of Cathy II's own mother, Cathy I. In this scene, Brontë fully establishes Lockwood's self-centered attempts at dominion over the literal female text.

The scene begins with several acts of physical intrusion. The first is Lockwood simply entering Cathy I's childhood room. Although the servant bids him access to the room, she also notes that "[Heathcliff] had an odd notion of the chamber; and never let anybody lodge there willingly" (*WH,* 60). The idea of physical intrusiveness grows more apparent as Lockwood investigates his surroundings. Once inside, his first impulse is to inspect a case-shaped structure in the room. Immediately, he "look[s] inside" and "perceives" its structure and contents without

---

[61] Consider, for example, Lockwood's description of her perceiving, "scornful" expression as unnatural or his description of her turning to look at him "as a miser might", p. 32

[62] p. 1030, Beth Newman, "The Situation of the Looker-On': Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights,*" *PMLA* 105, no. 5 (1990): 1030, https://doi.org/10.2307/462732.

sign of hesitation (*WH,* 61). It is through entering this structure—which he observes to be a sort of encased sitting couch–that he first encounters and reads Cathy I's text.

Lockwood's first act of literal reading occurs shortly thereafter. Surprisingly, Lockwood does not begin by reading the diary entries. Rather, he reads "writing scratched on the paint" (*WH*, 62). The writing consists of several variations of Cathy I's name: "Catherine Earnshaw," "Catherine Heathcliff," and "Catherine Linton" (*WH,* 62). Almost immediately after first reading these names, he begins to "spell over" and ponder them (*WH,* 63). The physical location of these names is incredibly important to characterizing this act of reading. Cathy I painted these words onto the walls of a private, shielded alcove. It is very unlikely that she intended for anyone to read these words, especially a complete stranger like Lockwood. In reading these names, Lockwood further emphasizes his intrusiveness by inserting himself into even the most private of writing.

In this intrusiveness, we see a self-centered desire for dominion over female text. As was mentioned earlier, Lockwood—especially with respect to female characters—despises reciprocation. He seeks control over how he perceives and is in turn perceived by characters and texts alike. We see this at play within the scene. After having perceived the names to his heart's content, and without Cathy I's consent, Lockwood closes his eyes to rest. However, not even five minutes later, "a glare of white letters started from the dark, as vivid as spectres [sic]" (*WH,* 63). The writing has responded to Lockwood's reading by acting on its own volition. Immediately, we see Lockwood seek control. He moves to "dispel the obtrusive name" (*WH,* 63). In doing so, he rejects an idea of reciprocity, especially one that involves autonomy on the part of the written text. Both of these ideas—of intrusiveness and a need for authority over the female text—reappear later in the scene when Lockwood finally reads Cathy I's diary.

Shortly thereafter, Lockwood examines the contents of Cathy I's library. In doing so, he discovers what appear to be Cathy I's diary entries. Notably, these entries are not located within a formal diary. Rather, they appear scribbled in the margins of Cathy I's books. Much has been written on the importance of form to diary. Within her seminal work *How to Read a Diary*, for instance, scholar Desirée Henderson notes the importance of spatial violations to diaries. In her chapter on diary conventions, for example, she writes that "paying attention to the spaces and images within a diary is another means of unlocking its meaning" before carrying on to note that "diarists employing preprinted diaries have to decide whether to honor these established parameters, or to adapt or violate them."[63] This comment introduces a newfound depth to Cathy I's authorship. The violation of diary form suddenly represents a sort of rebellion[64]; she specifically breaks expected diary form by writing in published novels, as if seeking to include her story alongside those of published authors. Within Henderson's writing, this violation assumes the presence of a traditional diary. And yet, as was just noted, Cathy I does not use an actual diary. With this in mind, Cathy I's choice to write within the margins of books heightens the act of rebellion. Her diary, then, might be read as clear symbol of attempted empowerment via female authorship.

How Lockwood responds to the clearly female-authored text is striking in its ability to quickly reaffirm his intrusive and domineering approach to female text. The context to his reading makes his intrusiveness immediately apparent. Once again, he finds Cathy I's writings within what appears to be a private alcove. The author, long dead, cannot explicitly consent to

---

[63] Pp. 321-322; Henderson, Desirée. "Conventions of the Diary," In *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st Century Readers*. (London: Routledge, 2019), 321-322.

[64] In his work on "The Image of the Book in *Wuthering Heights*," Robert C. McKibben attributes the book, which is "an instrument of oppression" in the servant Joseph's hands, to "rebellious protest" when possessed by the young Heathcliff and Cathy; Robert C McKibben, "The Image of the Book in *Wuthering Heights*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 15, no. 2 (1960): 160, https://doi.org/10.2307/2932453.

his reading. Despite this, he not only reads her writing but also records it in his own diary. In doing so, he considers neither how Cathy I might want him to read the text nor whether she would want him to read the text at all. Rather, he simply notes his "kindled" "interest" for the "unknown Catherine" –the voyeurism behind his reading either does not occur to him or does not bother him (*WH,* 65).

At first, the female author challenges this voyeurism. Shortly after his reading, Lockwood encounters a spectral version of Cathy I while in a dreamlike state. In her writing on the scene, Carol Jacobs describes this figure as a "textual emanation."[65] I, however, would go one step further and describe her figure as an authorial "emanation." This is made especially clear within her appearance. Repeatedly, Lockwood associates her appearance with childhood; he notes seeing her "child's face" and touching her "little, ice-cold hand" (*WH,* 83). In doing so, he connects her spirit with the age she was likely at upon writing her diary entries. As a result, the confrontation with the spectral Cathy I is not just between man and ghost but also reader and authoress.

Of course, Lockwood does not idly sit by during this scene. Rather, he brutally excludes the spectral Cathy from the room and prevents a full reunion of text + author. This violence is upfront and harrowing: Lockwood recounts "pull[ing]" her wrist and "rub[bing] it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes" (*WH,* 85). Shortly thereafter, Lockwood weaponizes Cathy I's old books, barring her from entry via her former reading. Through this, Lockwood limits the authority of the female author and attempts to exert dominion over her narrative. In this first scene, Lockwood successfully undermines the female author's assertion of

---

[65] p. 53; Carol Jacobs, "*Wuthering Heights*: At the Threshold of Interpretation." *Boundary 2* 7, no. 3 (1979): 53, https://doi.org/10.2307/303164.

presence and maintains her space for himself; he is successfully domineering in his approach to both author and text.

1d: A Tale of Two Cathy's

This scene, especially when contextualized by Lockwood's earlier "readings" of the female body, prepares the reader for his eventual relationship to Nelly's story. Within analysis of *Wuthering Heights*, several scholars have previously drawn a connection between Lockwood's reading of Cathy I's diary and his eventual consultation of Nelly. For example, Paula M. Krebs writes of him seeking out Nelly so as to "understand" his encounter with Cathy I's spectre.[66] In her work *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Sedgwick expresses a similar idea, stating that Lockwood seeks to "dismiss" Cathy I's ghost via Nelly's story.[67] Both scholars primarily make these comments in reference to Lockwood's relationship with the supernatural. However, we can easily extend these observations to a discussion of gender as well.

To do so, we must also draw upon and incorporate Newman's aforementioned analysis of Lockwood's voyeurism. In Newman's analysis, Lockwood approaches Nelly with a clear goal in mind: learning more of Cathy II, the current object of his gaze. Within the text, this motivation is fairly obvious: Lockwood outright remarks that "and—that pretty girl widow, I should like to know her history" (*WH*, 110). Within Newman's piece, she connects this goal back to her discussion of reciprocated gaze, remarking that "having looked Catherine in the eye only to be stared down, he now seeks to look again, as it were, through Nelly's eyes—that is, by hearing

---

[66] p. 46, Paula M Krebs, "Folklore, Fear, and the Feminine: Ghosts and Old Wives' Tales in '*Wuthering Heights*,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26, no. 1 (1998): 46, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058402.

[67] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, (New York: Arno, 1980), 106.

and appropriating Nelly's story."[68] Her comment identifies a deeper, additional motivation behind Lockwood entertaining Nelly's narrative: that of being able to safely "read" or interpret Cathy II without risk of a reciprocated gaze.

Newman largely associates this function with Lockwood's relationship to Cathy II; however, the same concept can likewise apply to his relationship with her mother. Recently having encountered Cathy I as spectral author, Lockwood now seeks to understand his experience, as was outlined earlier in this section. However, it is not just the supernatural he seeks to exert dominion over and understand--it is also the female text and the reciprocation of his readerly gaze. In his consultation of Nelly, Lockwood seeks an avenue for a safe reading of Cathy I and Cathy II alike. Notably, this avenue allows a preservation of his masculine voyeuristic gaze that often seeks to control both literal and figurative female texts.

Lockwood's tendency to center his own masculine gaze also appears within the structural relationship between his narrative and that of Nelly's. Within this relationship, Lockwood is the outer frame to Nelly's inner frame. On the surface, this dynamic further contributes to a prioritization of male over female narrative voice. Lockwood maintains an ability to edit Nelly's narration as he deems fit, a privilege that Nelly does not hold. Similarly, he also possesses the ability to interpret her narrative at the novel's beginning and end. His position as outer frame narrator allows him, at least on the surface, to prioritize his own narrative gaze even when technically recounting that of another. The surrounding context—that of Lockwood pursuing Nelly so as to resist the gazes of both Cathy I and Cathy II—only makes Lockwood's attempts at centering himself all the more apparent.

---

[68] Beth Newman, "'The Situation of the Looker-On': Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*," *PMLA* 105, no. 5 (1990): 1033, https://doi.org/10.2307/462732.

Overall then, we see in Lockwood's initial outer frame a narrative gaze that anticipates and complements his specific relationship to Nelly's inner frame. This gaze is not respectful; rather, it seeks to subjugate the female narrative and fears the mere possibility of reciprocation. This then appears within the structure of his narrative relative to Nelly's. Although this may seem to anticipate a novel that ultimately empowers a patriarchal gaze and/or framing, the novel's final third repeatedly demonstrates not only Lockwood's poor reading but also its connection to his eventual stagnancy within the narrative. Throughout this final third, Brontë emphasizes Lockwood's poor reading and undermines the patriarchal gaze motivating it. Ultimately, rather than empowering Lockwood's narrative gaze, his interactions with female narrative leave him stagnant.

1e: Stagnancy and Separation: Lockwood and the Ending of *Wuthering Heights*

"Thus ended Mrs. Dean's story. Notwithstanding the doctor's prophecy, I am rapidly recovering strength; and though it be only the second week in January, I propose getting out on horseback in a day or two, and riding over to Wuthering Heights, to inform my landlord that I shall spend the next six months in London; and, if he likes, he may look out for another tenant to take the place after October. I would not pass another winter here for much."

Wuthering Heights, Chapter 30

Lockwood's first comment after the completion of Nelly's frame barely considers the text. Immediately, we see a complete absence of active interpretation; Lockwood seems uninterested in discussing the contents of Nelly's now complete story. His only reference to her tale is that it's now complete. Upon finishing the text, which he seemed to approach with the

intention of using it to incorporate himself into his surroundings, Lockwood instead reveals that

he will "not pass another winter" in Thrushcross Grange (*WH,* 1042). Rather, he will "spend the

next six months in London" (*WH,* 1042). He intends to recover from his malady and return to the

south, where he is from. Immediately after this declaration, the chapter ends. In Lockwood's

immediate response, then, we see a certain stagnancy. By stagnancy, I refer not just to a lack of

dramatic change or development in Lockwood's character but to his seeming irrelevance to and

separation from the novel's core narratives.

Lockwood's stagnation will ripple across the novel's final beats, with scenes of particular

note appearing in chapters 31, 32, and the novel's final few paragraphs in chapter 34. Chapter 31

evidences Lockwood's failure to exert an influence over the narratives of *Wuthering Heights*,

especially those related to Cathy II. Chapter 32 then juxtaposes Lockwood and Hareton's

approaches to reading so as to emphasize the former's inability to learn via female texts. Finally,

in the novel's final scene, Brontë delivers one lingering image of Lockwood's stagnation through

exploring his inability to properly understand the world of *Wuthering Heights*. Along the way,

Brontë frequently reinvokes Lockwood's ineffectual approach to female narratives and, in doing

so, draws a connection between Lockwood's stagnancy and his inability to respectfully approach

the female text.

In chapter 31, Brontë clearly underscores Lockwood inability to exert influence over the

narrative of Wuthering Heights[69] through repeatedly invoking his failed romantic arc with Cathy

II. Upon entering the Heights household, Lockwood almost immediately notes Cathy II's

presence, specifically informing the reader that "she hardly raised her eyes to notice" him" (*WH,*

1045). Throughout the rest of the scene, Cathy II remains similarly distant. Although she

---

[69] The lack of italicization here is intentional as I'm chiefly referring to the arcs of those who occupy the household
in the novel's outer frame.

frequently speaks, most of her comments are directed towards Hareton, the man she will later fall in love with and marry. Even when perceived by Lockwood, she remains aloof, not even reciprocating his gaze with obvious discomfort. Lockwood, in comparison, is just barely a participant in the scene, only making the occasional comment.

When faced with her behavior, Lockwood seems incapable of using Nelly's story so as to initiate a conversation with Cathy II or understand her behavior. At present, Lockwood possesses a far more intimate knowledge of Cathy II and her circumstances than he did during their prior interactions. The story, finished by Nelly in the previous chapter, spends ample time tracing Cathy II's tragic marriage to the now deceased Linton and current life under the oppressive Heathcliff. Even brief consideration of these facts would suggest that Cathy II's distant, somewhat cold behavior therefore likely stems from her present circumstances. And yet, in his reaction to Cathy II's aforementioned distant behavior, Lockwood centers himself. Affronted, he complains of her "never returning [his] bow and good morning by the slightest acknowledgement" (*WH*, 1045). Within this brief exchange, Brontë captures Lockwood's self-centered gaze, corresponding inability to properly apply Nelly's narrative, and resulting stagnancy. Overall, unable to properly interpret both his surroundings and Nelly's narrative, he is stagnant in his attempts to insert himself into Cathy II's life.

This interrelation between his reading and his stagnancy becomes especially apparent in the chapter's final lines. Here, Lockwood remarks that "what a realization of something more romantic than a fairy tale it would have been for Mrs. Linton Heathcliff, had she and I struck up an attachment, as her good nurse desired, and migrated together into the stirring atmosphere of town." (*WH,* 1064). There's an immediate sense of irony to these lines: knowledge of Lockwood and Cathy II's prior interactions would suggest that their courtship would be anything but a

"fairytale" to Cathy II. Likewise, it's probable—given Cathy II's demonstrated comfort with the moors—that only Lockwood would enjoy migrating to London. Here again, we see an image of Lockwood as a poor reader; in his time with both current and narrated Cathy II, Lockwood appears to have neither changed in his perception of her nor learned how to look beyond himself when perceiving her. Beyond this, we once again see a connection to ideas of stagnancy. Prior to his departure, Lockwood's final line is one that acknowledges how little life has changed for him since his arrival on the moors. Alongside this, it specifically acknowledges how little he has influenced Cathy II's life; despite his fixation on her, she is no more attached to him than she was at the novel's onset.

In chapter 32, which takes place several months later, Lockwood returns to the Heights one last time. Upon his return, he finds the household drastically transformed**.** Heathcliff is nowhere to be seen. Hareton and Cathy II, meanwhile, appear to have fallen in love and now intend to marry. Lockwood, in comparison to the happy couple, continues to demonstrate no evidence of change: he makes no note of important life updates or sudden realizations he has had after his time on the moors.

Incredibly important to Lockwood seeing Cathy II again is what she's doing: reading, more specifically reading with her betrothed Hareton. Before entering the room, Lockwood can "hear them" talking and reading together (*WH*, 1073). In some ways, Hareton and Cathy II's conversation mirrors those of preceding chapters, with Cathy mocking Hareton for his blunders. And yet, the surrounding environment is peaceful. Cathy's voice is "sweet as a silver bell" while Hareton's responds in "softened tones" (*WH,* 1073). Lockwood's actual description of seeing them leans into this feeling of peace, with Lockwood recalling Hareton's "handsome features…glowing with pleasure" and Cathy II's "shining ringlets blending, at intervals, with his

brown locks" (*WH,* 1074). The close connection between reading and the peace of their relationship therefore speaks to the power of properly engaging the text.[70]

These details only serve to underscore Lockwood's failure to properly approach the female narrative. When juxtaposed against Hareton's reading, Lockwood's inadequacies as a reader and listener become all the more glaring. Compare, for example, Lockwood's interactions with Cathy I to those between Hareton and Cathy II. Hareton strives for invited connection between himself and the written text and does so under the tutelage of a far more experienced female reader. Lockwood forcefully removes Cathy I's ghost from the room, favoring instead a self-serving consumption of a female text detached from its author. The same might be said for his interactions with Nelly; although he does express some respect for Nelly,[71] Lockwood ultimately approaches her text in service of his own "reading" of Cathy II + her body. As a result, Lockwood once again remains stagnant. Whereas Hareton successfully courts and later marries Cathy II, Lockwood remains the ever separate onlooker.

Within the following chapter, we see Brontë reinvoke the inner frame, this time using it as a clear barrier between Lockwood and *Wuthering Height's* narrative. In order to understand Heathcliff's absence and Cathy II/Hareton's changed relationship, Lockwood must once again consult Nelly. Within her resulting inner frame, Nelly relays two of the most climactic sequences within the novel: Heathcliff's death and Cathy II/Hareton's courtship. Components of the inner frame, both these plot lines remain removed from Lockwood. In constructing this separation, Brontë once again highlights Lockwood's stagnancy and irrelevance. The key developments of

---

[70] In reference to the image of the book, McKibben writes of it being a "reflection of the stabilizing love of Cathy and Hareton"; p. 160, Robert C McKibben, "The Image of the Book in *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 15, no. 2 (1960): 160, https://doi.org/10.2307/2932453.

[71] It is worth noting that this "respect" remains deeply classist. When complimenting Nelly, Lockwood is careful to qualify his praise with a disparaging remark towards the servant class at large.

the novel evade the unchanging Lockwood, who inhabits—or facilitates perhaps—a different frame within the novel.

Shortly thereafter, Brontë concludes the text's outer frame with a final nod to Lockwood's lackluster and stagnant relationship to the narratives of *Wuthering Heights*. Here, both components of this relationship manifest within Lockwood's failure to properly interpret his surroundings. In the novel's final chapter, Nelly concludes her second inner frame by revealing to Lockwood that several people have claimed to see ghosts on the moors. Most memorably, she recounts a young boy's claim to having seen "Heathcliff and a woman" (whom we presume to be Cathy I) "yonder, under t' nab" (*WH,* 1178). Explicitly, Nelly dismisses this story, explaining that the boy "probably raised phantoms from thinking, as he traversed the moors alone" (*WH*, 1178-79). And yet, her dismissal nonetheless maintains a possibly for the supernatural. For example, consider the phrasing of the comment itself: the boy only "probably"—but not definitely or surely—imagined the phantoms. We once again see her implicit acknowledgement of the supernatural in her later comment that "yet, still, [she doesn't] like being out in the dark now" (*WH,* 1191). Beyond demonstrating a loose connection between Nelly and belief in a potential supernatural, these comments also demonstrate her connection to *Wuthering Heights* as both place and narrative. A longtime inhabitant of the moors and well acquainted with the references to the supernatural made by characters like Heathcliff and Cathy I, Nelly seems reluctant to dismiss its possibility fully.

Lockwood, in comparison, appears comfortable in his own dismissal of the supernatural. In the novel's final scene, Lockwood considers the graves of Heathcliff, Cathy I, and Edgar. While standing before the three graves, Lockwood delivers the novel's final line: "I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells,

listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one [sic] could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (*WH*, 1183). Lockwood's dismissal of the supernatural is clear. In the sentence's final clause, he invokes ideas of peace and sleep three times. Delivered in quick succession, these invocations ("slumbers," "sleepers," and "quiet earth") conjure an image of the moors far too peaceful for ghosts or other supernatural entities (*WH*, 1183).

When considering the proximity of the supernatural within the text, this comment may strike the reader as outright inaccurate or, at the very least, dubious. Throughout the text, Lockwood specifically has come within close proximity to the supernatural. Within the very first few chapters of *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood encounters a ghost-like Cathy I while in a dreamlike state. While listening to Nelly's story, he frequently hears not only Nelly's casual references to the supernatural,[72] but also those made by other characters such as Cathy I and Heathcliff. In her work on the "indebtedness" of *Wuthering Heights* to ballad tradition, Sheila Smith writes that "the supernatural is of central importance in *Wuthering Heights*, and is totally convincing because in the world of the novel…it is a constant and accepted element of life."[73] With this in mind, Lockwood not only appears inattentive in his ability to interpret Nelly's narrative but also stagnant as a character. Despite having ample opportunity to learn of the inner workings and key forces of the novel's setting, Lockwood remains unable to acknowledge even a

---

[72] Throughout the text, Nelly makes reference to the supernatural—especially that which might be connected with folk tradition—in conversation. In chapter 7, for instance, Nelly makes reference to fairy visitors eating food left on the table. For a fairly wholistic consideration of Nelly's casual references to the supernatural, consider consulting Sheila Smith and PM Krebs's work on *Wuthering Heights.*

[73] Sheila Smith, "'At Once Strong and Eerie': The Supernatural in *Wuthering Heights* and Its Debt to the Traditional Ballad," *The Review of English Studies* 43, no. 172 (1992): 499, http://www.jstor.org/stable/518730; Although Sheila's quote was perhaps most pertinent to my analysis, countless other scholars have analyzed the supernatural within *Wuthering Heights*, some of whom are cited elsewhere within my thesis. Consult Paula M. Krebs, Anne Williams, and Peter D. Grudin's work for further consideration of the supernatural within *Wuthering Heights*.

potential supernatural presence. He is therefore inert in his relationship to a key component of the text.

The invocation of nature within his comment makes especially apparent this inertness. Consistently, *Wuthering Heights* demonstrates a proclivity towards interconnecting that which is natural with that which is supernatural. Anne Williams, within her work on "natural supernaturalism,"[74] notes that Brontë "offers the reader, in various portions of her book, two ways of grasping the interrelationship of the natural and the supernatural." One of these two methods involves "using the characters' imagination-charged perceptions to lend an eerie enchantment to the former [the natural]."[75] Within his comment, Lockwood does the opposite. He imbues the earth with a peacefulness, separating the moors from any ghostlike figures supposed to inhabit it. To Lockwood, the earth hosts nothing but the quiet slumbers of the thoroughly dead. The structure of his comment mirrors this; it is only after describing the naturalism[76] of the scene around him that Lockwood moves to dismiss the supernatural. Lockwood's failure to synthesize or interrelate the natural and supernatural therefore only adds to an image of him as both inattentive reader and stagnant character.

The novel ends by encouraging its readers to doubt Lockwood. Writing on the novel's final scene, Peter D. Grundin notes a disconnect between Lockwood and reader generated by the former's final comment. In his piece, entitled "*Wuthering Heights:* The Question of Unquiet Slumbers," he writes the following:

"The genteel understatement of Lockwood's phrase, 'unquiet slumbers,' is the last of a series of qualifications the novel imposes on the credibility of his perspective, a series of

---

[74] The classic work on natural supernaturalism in the romantic age is MH Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971)
[75] Anne Williams, "Natural Supernaturalism in '*Wuthering Heights*,'" *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 1 (1985): 109, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174198.
[76] By naturalism, I refer to his descriptions of nature, including his depictions of foliage and the wind.

implicit criticisms creating a view of Lockwood that transforms the model of the novel's

final scene: what is unequivocally declarative for him becomes provisionally

interrogative for the reader, and for the latter the problem of ghostly afterlife remains

unequivocally."[77]

The reader, more attentive to the text's supernatural components than Lockwood, is therefore

inclined to reject our narrator's confident dismissal. From the perspective of reader, this in turn

strengthens a feeling of doubt towards Lockwood. This doubt not only encompasses his direct

ability to "read" surrounding narratives, but also extends to his ability to learn from them.

Narratively, Lockwood ends the novel in a state of stagnancy interrelated with his poor

readership of narrative (especially those which are, like Nelly's, female).

A consideration of the scene's context emphasizes one final time this concluding image

of Lockwood as unchanged from his experiences, for he ends the novel stagnant in more than

just his relationship to the supernatural. A failure in both his attempts to incorporate himself into

the Yorkshire community and court Cathy II, Lockwood ends the novel neither married nor

reformed, two endings typical amongst novels from this period.[78] The immediate context to

Lockwood's discussion of the supernatural highlights his romantic stagnancy in particular. Just

immediately prior to making this comment, Lockwood watches the happy Hareton and Cathy II--

now so changed in their demeanor from earlier in the text--return from a jaunt across the moors.

---

[77] Peter D. Grudin, "*Wuthering Heights*: The Question of Unquiet Slumbers," *Studies in the Novel* 6, no. 4 (1974): 389, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29531684.

[78] Scholarship on marriage in the Brontë novels largely assume that marriage plots were common in Victorian Literature. For a separate source that documents the importance of the marriage plot, consider "The Marriage Plot in Theory." In it, Cathy Alexis Psomiades states that "marriage is the material of nineteenth-century British fiction"; p. 53 Kathy Alexis Psomiades. "The Marriage Plot in Theory." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 43, no. 1 (2010), 53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27764369; For a discussion of the relevance of moral reformation to Victorian literature, consider works by a few *Tenant* scholars such as Rachel Carnell, Carol A. Senf, Tess O'Toole, and Elizabeth Langland.

He, meanwhile, is poised to leave the world within which he so desperately tried to center himself.

In comparison, many of the text's female narratives appear especially dynamic and central to the novel's key events and, in doing so, highlight Lockwood's narrative rigidity. Central amongst these is Cathy I's narrative, which comprises the core of Nelly's inner frame. In reference to the text's inner frame, Q.D. Leavis goes so far as to attribute the text's central 'truths' to Cathy I.[79] Even in her death, Cathy maintains a certain dynamism and centrality, her spirit transitioning from being lost and childlike to reunited with Heathcliff. Simultaneously, her influence is pervasive within the lives of those still inhabiting Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Her influence may not always, or even often, be positive; however, she stands as undeniably central to the novel itself.

The same might be said for two other prominent female characters: Cathy II and Nelly. Cathy II undergoes a radical transformation within both the inner and outer frames of the text. Crucially, this transformation occurs independent of Lockwood and his own narrative gaze. Lockwood may narrate her and her actions but, in doing so, he cannot exert any notable influence over her own narrative arc. In fact, Cathy II's very arc, which Lockwood delivers, actively interferes with Lockwood's own narrative gaze. Nelly, likewise, benefits from and actively participates in the narrative's core events. Across the text, she influences the lives of several characters, usually through her decisions regarding whether to conceal or reveal key pieces of information. At the novel's conclusion, Nelly sees Cathy II remarried and the two

---

[79] Excerpted from p. 147 of Stoneman's "Feminist Criticism of *Wuthering Heights*";Patsy Stoneman, "Feminist Criticism of '*Wuthering Heights*,'" *Critical Survey* 4, no. 2 (1992): 147, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41555645.

households she's lived in restored. When juxtaposed against these female characters, Lockwood appears even more inert; he neither develops nor particularly influences the events of the novel.

In doing so, Brontë ultimately creates a text in which a patriarchal gaze is disempowered and stagnant, especially in its relationships with female narrative. Brontë responds to Lockwood's approach to female text as literal and figurative object by denying him entry into the novel's core narratives. Lockwood's gaze does not accomplish its goals, and he leaves the moors an unchanged man. The female narrative, in comparison, permeates and evolves across the text irrespective of Lockwood's male gaze. Although contained or portrayed by Lockwood's gaze, the female story and storyteller remain ultimately untouched or unchanged by it. Through this, Lockwood ultimately ends the novel little more than a mouthpiece through which the stories of Wuthering Heights's current and former tenants, many of whom are women, may pass.

Reforming Reading: Male Readers and the Transformative Capabilities of Female Texts within Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

2a: A Brief Introduction

In her introduction to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall's*[80] second edition, Anne Brontë makes the following comment: "All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read."[81] The implications are clear. Readers should not avoid texts on account of the author's gender, for reading is an act that crosses gendered lines. Within the context of nineteenth-century gender dynamics, we can read a more pointed meaning into this comment: more specifically, men should not avoid texts written by women. Across the actual text of *Tenant*, Brontë preemptively anticipates what she would later write in her preface. The text features several male readers of different backgrounds and dispositions, including Gilbert Markham, Arthur Huntingdon, and Ralph Hattersley. Gilbert, who also serves as outer frame narrator, spends a particularly noteworthy portion of the text reading. In fact, it is an act of reading that initiates the chain of events precipitating both his narration and eventual marriage to Helen. Upon first approaching the female text, Gilbert possesses a fairly patriarchal and self-serving gaze–one he will gradually unlearn through his interactions with both Helen and her text(s), which contain a highly feminized account of Victorian social ills.[82] Within *Tenant*, Brontë therefore uses Gilbert's

---

[80] From this point onward abbreviated as *Tenant.*

[81] Anne Brontë,'Preface to the Second Edition,' in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. by Stevie Davies (London: Penguin Random House UK, 1996): 8; Digital, pagination will differ from print edition by nature of being digital. From this point onward, in-text citations will be written in the following style (*Tenant, #).*

[82] Like *Wuthering Heights*, Anne's novel was likewise often criticized for being too "coarse." In her work on "horror and disgust" in readings of *Tenant*, Marianne Thormählen notes that "coarse is the most frequent term of censure in contemporary review"; Marianne Thormählen, "'Horror and disgust': Reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," Brontë Studies* 44, no. 1 (2019): 5, 10.1080/14748932.2019.1525872

reading to underscore a transformative capability to women's writing, a focus or goal that she supplements with her treatment of other male readers in the text.

2b: Framing the Male Reader and Female Author: A Brief Overview

Criticism of *Tenant*–positive, negative, or neutral–often focuses on its narrative style. Within *Tenant*, Brontë begins and ends the novel with Gilbert's own epistolary narration; encased within this outer frame are two separate texts, both of which are written by Helen Huntingdon. As was seen in *Wuthering Heights*, the interplay between inner and outer narratives mirrors the act of engaging with women's storytelling. However, in the case of *Tenant*, the engagement is more directly related to reading than what we observed in *Wuthering Heights*. His outer frame consists of letters addressed to his unseen male friend J. Halford, all of which largely serve to recount his developing relationship with Helen Huntingdon. Crucial to the development of this relationship is Gilbert reading Helen's diary, which comprises the text's first, and primary, inner frame. Later, a second inner frame briefly enters the text: that of Helen's letters. The relationship between these inner frames and Gilbert's outer frame directly represents that between text and reader. Gilbert quite literally reads and responds to Helen's diary within his actual narration just as he later responds to, internalizes, and interprets her letters.

For a demonstration of this, consider the first transition between inner and outer frame. Leading up to this transition, Gilbert receives Helen's diary. In his narration, Gilbert recounts how he "panting with eagerness, and struggling to suppress [his] hopes…hurried home, and rushed upstairs to [his] room." He then quickly lights a candle and proceeds to "hastily [turn] over the leaves and [snatch] a sentence here and there" before reading it in full (*Tenant,* 535). Shortly thereafter, he relays its contents to Halford. Unlike Lockwood, Gilbert does not interrupt the subsequent inner frame so as to provide his commentary or interpretations. After its

completion, however, Gilbert does grapple with and struggle to apply or act upon its contents. Through this, the audience sees evidence of his active engagement with and reading of Helen's female texts.

Along the way, Gilbert frequently interacts with the author of these texts: Helen Huntingdon. His reading is therefore not only related to his treatment of the direct text(s) but also to how he in turn treats the female artist. The narrative structure once again mirrors this idea: Gilbert's male narrative comes into contact with Helen's female artist narrative. The frequent invocation of gender in my writing thus far highlights a second dynamic embodied within the frame narrative: an interaction between man and woman. As was the case in *Wuthering Heights*, the audience/storyteller dynamic is gendered, with our audience being male and storyteller being female.

Reading *Tenant's* framed narrative as a stand-in for gender relations is well-established within scholarship. Within her seminal work on the subject, N.M. Jacobs provides one of the first comprehensive analyses of the frame narrative as it relates to gender, commenting that Brontë, within *Tenant*,[83] "seemed to find it necessary first to become that constructed creature, a man, to appropriate and delegitimize his power, before telling their anti-patriarchal truths."[84] Concurrent to and since N.M. Jacobs' analysis, several other scholars have analyzed the gendered interaction embodied by the frame narrative device.[85] Although these scholars often disagree with one another on the progressiveness of the interaction embodied, they all recognize it as gendered

---

[83] It's worth noting that N.M. Jacobs also considers *Wuthering Heights* within this analysis. The full quotation reads "Yet both sisters, in approaching subjects they must have known would be controversial, seemed to find it necessary first to become that constructed creature, a man, to appropriate and delegitimize his power, before telling their anti-patriarchal truths."; N. M. Jacobs, "Gender and Layered Narrative in '*Wuthering Heights*' and '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.*'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 16, no. 3 (1986): 205, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225153.
[84] See prior footnote for reference.
[85] For other considerations of the frame narrative device as it relates to gender, consult works by Carol A. Senf, Rachell Carnell, O'Toole, Russell Poole, Elizabeth Langland, Deborah Morse, and Catherine Quirk.

nonetheless. When combining this pre-established perspective with my own focus on reading, we can imagine the frame narrative as a tool that allows Brontë to simulate how men might interact with both text and authoress. As Gilbert's relationship to the text transforms, so too does his relationship to Helen. Through Gilbert's outer frame narration, the audience sees the developing and interlinked relationships between both male reader/female text and male reader/female artist.

2c: "Somewhat of a Gentleman Farmer": Identifying and Characterizing the Masculine Gaze in Gilbert

Before his transformation, Gilbert begins the text as a fairly confident, self-assured, and somewhat domineering country farmer. At the novel's onset, Gilbert is something of a golden boy by the standards of his town. He is adored by his mother and the inheritor of his deceased father's farmland. Much of this persona connects back to his gender. As he himself says, "my father, as you know, was a sort of gentleman farmer…and I, by his express desire succeeded him in the same quiet occupation" (*Tenant,* 117). Gilbert maintains a profession gendered not only in title–"gentleman farmer"--but also in mode of inheritance (from father to eldest son). Romantically, he does not seem short on prospects, with him expressing clear—if not slightly condescending—interest in Eliza quite early on. Here again, we see a gendering. His romantic success evidences a presumably heterosexual male identity.

In his initial personality, we see parallels to characters of a more "Lockwoodian" disposition. Early on in the text, Gilbert demonstrates a somewhat inflated sense of self. For example, after noting his profession in chapter one, Gilbert confesses that "ambition urged [him] to higher aims, and self-conceit assured [him] that, in disregarding its voice, [he] was burying [his] talent in the earth, and hiding [his] light under a bushel" (*Tenant,* 117). This inflated sense

of self arises in part from his relationship with his mother, who often dotes on him throughout the text and regularly prioritizes his male comfort. In one particularly revealing scene, Rose, his sister, retorts "but you—we can't do too much for you. It's always so—if there's anything particularly nice at the table, mamma winks and nods at me to abstain from it, and if I don't attend to that, she whispers, 'Don't eat so much of that, Rose; Gilbert will like it for his supper'" (*Tenant,* 280). In comparison, she feels as if she's "nothing at all" (*Tenant,* 280). Overall, Gilbert lives a life in which his masculine self is central and valued, which in turn only encourages his own preoccupation with self.

As is the case with Lockwood, this preoccupation with self affects how he "reads" female bodies. For an example, consider his initial reaction upon seeing Helen:

"And there I beheld a tall, lady-like figure, clad in black. Her face was towards me, and there was something in it which, once seen, invited me to look again. Her hair was raven black, and disposed in long glossy ringlets, a style of coiffure rather unusual in those days, but always graceful and becoming; her complexion was clear and pale; her eyes I could not see, for, being bent upon her prayer-book, they were concealed by their drooping lids and long black lashes, but the brows above were expressive and well defined; the forehead was lofty and intellectual, the nose, a perfect aquiline and the features, in general, unexceptionable—only there was a slight hollowness about the cheeks and eyes, and the lips, though finely formed, were a little too thin, a little too firmly compressed, and had something about them that betokened, I thought, no very soft or amiable temper; and I said in my heart—'I would rather admire you from this distance, fair lady, than be the partner of your home.'" (*Tenant,* 140-41)

At the onset of his description, his narration makes clear his potential attraction; for Gilbert, "there was something it it [her appearance] which, once seen, invited [him] to look

again" (*Tenant,* 140). He makes this attraction even more apparent in his hyper specific

descriptions of her "long black lashes," "expressive and well defined" brows, and "clear"

complexion (*Tenant,* 140). Near the end of his description, Gilbert begins to associate the details

of her appearance with personality traits; he, for example, associates her lip shape with a lack of

"soft or amiable temper" (*Tenant,* 141). On the basis of this particular observation, Gilbert

remarks that he'd "rather admire [her] from this distance…than be partner of [her] home"

(*Tenant,*141). In doing so, Gilbert moves beyond merely making assumptions about her

personality to project onto her a particular fate or path for women: being courted and married to

a man before moving to occupy the domestic space.

In her writing on Gilbert, scholar Tess O'Toole makes note of the specific archetypes he

tends to project onto women, especially at the novel's onset. In reference to his collective

remarks on both Helen and Eliza, O'Toole notes that Gilbert "subscribes to all the standard

Victorian stereotypes about female nature and female merit (as evidence by his behavior toward

and descriptions of both the 'demon' Eliza Millward, his first flame, and the "angel" Helen)."[86]

Through projecting onto Helen, Eliza, and etc. Victorian archetypes, Gilbert limits the range of

characteristics they might possess within his gaze. Within this gaze, we therefore see not only a

centering of the male self but also a necessary and interlinked subjugation or confinement of the

female body. Alexandra Wettlaufer makes a similar argument–albeit with respect to

Romanticism--claiming that Gilbert "as a romantic viewer and reader of the world…can see and

read Helen only through Romanticism's distorting and unrealistic lens."[87] In both cases, we see

---

[86] Tess O'Toole, "Siblings and Suitors in the Narrative Architecture of '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 4 (1999): 716, https://doi.org/10.2307/1556270.
[87] Alexandra K Wettlaufer, "Brontë's Portraits of Romantic Resistance: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," In *Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Painting and the Novel in France and Britain, 1800–1860,* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011): 227, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16rdd1n.13.

Gilbert force onto the female body a "reading" based in his own prioritization of social or literary convention.

Immediately thereafter, as if in response to the presumptiveness of his gaze, Helen looks back and perceives his obvious attraction to her. In response, Gilbert notes her making a "momentary, indefinable expression of scorn" that is "inexpressibly provoking" to him (*Tenant,* 141-42). Within Gilbert's response, we see an immediate parallel with Lockwood and Cathy II's initial interactions. Much like Lockwood, Gilbert frames the reciprocation of her gaze, in particular her ability to make judgements about him through it, as negative or provocative. Gilbert seems interested in perceiving and projecting himself onto the women around him; however, he expresses little interest in being perceived back. Likewise, he does not take well to women deviating from the narratives he creates for them. In making a "scornful expression," Helen pushes back against the sexualization underlying his gaze and therefore provokes his ire.

In her work, Elizabeth King connects this response back to Gilbert's need for what she dubs "masculine control." According to King, "from the beginning of his narrative, Gilbert positions himself as the embodiment of sustained masculine control."[88] Within her analysis, King chiefly relates this back to matters of animal husbandry; however, it applies well to his interactions with women as well: Gilbert seeks out a masculine control over how he perceives and in turn is (or isn't) perceived. As this scene demonstrates, any break from this status quo disturbs him, especially when it is enacted by a woman.

Typically, Gilbert's gaze manifests itself within obnoxious comments or glaring presumptions. However, on occasion, his masculinized perceptions of the female body–particularly those that frame Helen as romantic object–culminate in violence. For example,

---

[88] Elizabeth King. "'Uncivil Usage': Shifting Forms of Control in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 138, (2020): 124-140, doi:10.1353/vct.2020.0009.

consider Gilbert's action towards Lawrence, who the text eventually reveals to be Helen's brother. Fueled by village gossip and his own anxieties,[89] Gilbert has a confrontation in which he eventually whips Lawrence in an extreme act of violence. In a dissatisfactory exchange with Helen, Gilbert once again demonstrates violence, recalling giving her hand a "spiteful squeeze" while shaking it. As Tess O'Toole notes, Gilbert "while not the rake that Arthur Huntingdon was, is capable, like Arthur, of [a] violence and cowardice" linked in part to how he "reads" the women around him.[90]

2d: Pushback from the Female Artist

Before Gilbert even reads the text, he faces pushback in this perspective from the female artist. Their first significant conversation begins with Helen commanding that Gilbert return her child Arthur to her. Throughout most of the prior scenes, Gilbert has seemed fairly confident and competent (i.e., in his element). Here, we see him almost immediately thrown out of balance by the "vehemence" of her tone (*Tenant,* 169). Shortly thereafter, Helen asserts an additional boundary upon noticing the way Gilbert is gazing and smiling at her. The specifics of Gilbert's gaze are not hard to intuit. When considering that his smile immediately follows her noting that she thought she "saw [him] at church on Sunday" and that he was notably intrigued by her during the service, he very well may have been flirtatiously gazing at her (*Tenant,* 169). Helen's subsequent brusqueness therefore serves to dissipate any flirtatious undertones their interaction

---

[89] By anxieties, I refer chiefly to those which arise as a result of Gilbert sighting Lawrence and Helen together. Despite no explicit evidence of a romantic connection, Gilbert spirals into anxiety about the nature of their relationship after sighting the two of them.

[90] Tess O'Toole, "Siblings and Suitors in the Narrative Architecture of '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 4 (1999): 716, https://doi.org/10.2307/1556270.

may have taken on within his narration. She once again demonstrates an ability to undercut or counteract Gilbert's attempts at framing her.

Within their second extended conversation, Helen's ability to undercut Gilbert's masculine confidence is made more apparent. Upon paying a visit to the Markham household, Helen eventually engages Gilbert in a bit of debate regarding how to properly raise male children. The mere fact that this argument even occurs empowers Helen's voice. In this scene, Helen's commentary shows her ability to participate in discussions of public importance. Across scenes such as these, Brontë "allows her heroine…to speak out in the manner of the exceptional…woman writer." She does so in a manner clearly "rational, confident, and self-sufficient."[91] Within this particular scene, the style and form of her dialogue clearly underscore this confidence. Often, her responses are much longer and more involved than those of Gilbert, pointing towards the depth and extent of her opinion. Gilbert, for the most part, is less eloquent in his opposition. Gilbert seeing his opinions confidentially challenged and refined within this scene stands as significant: historically coddled by his mother, Gilbert is likely unaccustomed to resistance, especially resistance from a woman. Via this interaction, the female voice demonstrates its ability to confidentially center and empower itself within a conservation, which foreshadows the later importance and centrality of Helen's text.

During Gilbert and Helen's first positive interaction, we see Brontë anticipate a powerful quality to this text by preemptively demonstrating the artistic prowess of its author. Within this scene, Gilbert and Helen converse within a space that underscores her connection to art. The very first detail Gilbert notes, in fact, is "a painter's easel" (*Tenant,* 241). Notice the specific description here: Gilbert describes it as belonging clearly to a painter, an early reference perhaps

---

[91] Rachel K. Carnell, "Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53, no. 1 (1998): 10, https://doi.org/10.2307/2902968.

to the professionalism of Helen's art. Throughout their ensuing conversation, Brontë will surround him with constant reminders of Helen's artistry, especially that which is mature or professional.[92]

Furthermore, within this scene, we see Helen exude a sort of authority over her work. This is no more apparent than in her reaction to Gilbert appraising a portrait of her husband Arthur Huntingdon. Gilbert, disregarding the artist's consent, examines the portrait, which Helen had previously concealed. Upon realizing that Helen has noticed him, Gilbert admits to lacking the artist's consent, stating that he fears "it will be considered an act of impertinence" (*Tenant,* 253). Nonetheless, he still ventures to ask Helen a question about the painting. Immediately, Helen rebukes him. She confirms that "it is an act of great impertinence" before requesting that he not ask about the painting (*Tenant,* 253). Here, Brontë establishes a dynamic in which Helen maintains authority over her artistic products and demonstrates at least partial control over how Gilbert can perceive them. This authority will later reappear in her relationship to her diary.

The tension between Helen and Gilbert continues throughout the following few chapters and culminates in Helen handing her diary off to Gilbert. Here again, we see the text prime Gilbert for a productive, transformative reading through first empowering the female author. First and foremost, it is important to simply note that Helen willingly gives Gilbert the diary. In doing so, she as an author consents to his reading. Only after this does Gilbert read her diary. Furthermore, in giving him the diary, she maintains an ability to edit her own work. During the diary handoff, Gilbert notes that Helen "hastily [tears] away a few leaves from the end "prior to giving it to him'" (*Tenant,* 534). In doing so, she exhibits clear editorial authority over her own written work.

---

[92] At one point, her son Arthur even explicitly mentions his mother selling her paintings for profit.

It is also important to consider the temporal component to the diary. The temporal distance between Helen's writing of the diary and Gilbert's reading of the diary also preserves her authority. In his writing on *Tenant*, Russel Poole briefly considers an alternative narrative structure proposed by George Moore: that of Helen orally relaying the story of her marriage to Gilbert. [93] In response, Poole comments that "to change the technique would of course be to change the ideology, because in Moore's scheme Gilbert would be present to Helen as she constructed her self-narration and would inevitably compromise its autonomy."[94] The diary, started years prior to Helen and Gilbert's first meeting, is distant from Gilbert's own gaze. His gaze, of course, can affect how he perceives the diary and, likewise, how he might transcribe it. However, his perspective remains completely separate from the diary's initial formulation; Helen wrote the diary not for Gilbert but for herself. In summation then, the lead up to Gilbert reading the diary not only anticipates his beginning transformation but does so in a manner that empowers our female artist, Helen.

2.e: Helen's Diary: An Interlude

Several components of the diary, mainly those that relate back to gender, deserve brief analysis before our consideration of Gilbert's transformation. First and foremost, as was discussed earlier, the diary itself clearly centers its female author. It is unavoidably written by a woman in the 1800s. Much of this "gendering" relates back to its depictions of domestic violence, alcoholism, and nineteenth-century expectations for masculinity. Many of these

---

[93] Moore's full comment on the novel is as follows: "Your heroine must tell the young farmer her story, and an entrancing scene you will make of the telling. Moreover, the presence of your heroine, her voice, her gestures, the questions that would arise and the answers that would be given to them, would preserve the atmosphere of a passionate and original love story"; George Moore, *Conversations in Ebury Street, by George Moore*, (London: Heinemann, 1924), 218.

[94] Russell Poole, "Cultural Reformation and Cultural Reproduction in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33, no. 4 (1993): 859, https://doi.org/10.2307/450753.

experiences belong to Helen; however, others belong to additional female characters such as

Milicent Hattersley. A reader, such as Gilbert, would be hard-pressed to escape the simple fact

that a woman authored it.

In its femininity, the diary has a subversive quality. Across its countless entries, the diary

recounts a woman un-learning society's expectations for her gender. Much of this involves ideas

of women as domestic reformers. In her initial relationship to Huntingdon, Helen seems to strive

towards adopting the persona of domestic "reformer" or "angel." In reference to these personas,

O'Toole notes that, across Helen's diaries, we see a transition from her "ardent belief" that "as

her husband's 'angel monitress' she can redeem him" to an ultimate acknowledgment of "the

problem with the entire notion of the wife as agent of reform."[95] Along the way, the diary also

recounts a woman's burgeoning "professionalism" as an artist, an arc that directly contradicts

popular conceptions of female artists as inherently amateur. In her work on *Tenant*, Antonia

Losano devotes consistent attention to Helen's development as a professional artist. According to

Losano, the "novel dramatizes the transition from amateur, accomplished woman to professional

female artist–a historical transition that is in its earliest stages at precisely the moment of the

writing and publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hal*l."[96] Within the diary, we see some of this

transition, including Helen's attempts at using her art to fund an escape from Huntingdon. In its

portrayal of both woman as reformer and woman as artist, the diary therefore pushes back

against social conventions. This too anticipates an almost transformative power of the diary as it

---

[95] Tess O'Toole, "Siblings and Suitors in the Narrative Architecture of '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 4 (1999): 717, https://doi.org/10.2307/1556270.
[96] Antonia Losano, "The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 58, no. 1 (2003): 5, https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2003.58.1.1.

relates to Gilbert, who initially subscribes to, rather than challenges, social convention in his

perception of Helen.

As a final note, we must consider the diary's treatment of reading. Within the text, Helen

includes two additional male readers: her husband Arthur Huntingdon and his friend Ralph

Hattersley, the husband of Helen's own friend Milicent Hattersley. Scenes involving these two

men feature drastically different approaches to the female text. Through including these scenes,

Brontë not only demonstrates a transformative capability of female text but also outlines for us

Gilbert's potential trajectories as a reader.

Before Huntingdon actually reads Helen's writing, he consistently fails to respect her

visual art. This is initially present within his interpretations of her paintings. Rather than

respecting her as a burgeoning artist, Huntingdon instead favors shallow and condescending

interpretations of her art.[97] Notably, these interpretations often lean into gender stereotypes

regarding young women. In doing so, they bar her from the identity of "artist" and instead entrap

her within the identity of "young, female amateur." Upon finally reading her diaries, this

disrespect becomes more violent. Take, for example, the events of chapter 40. The scene begins

with Huntingdon reading her writing over her own shoulder. Notably, this is "unknown" to

Helen, meaning that she has not consented to the audience reading her work. Immediately

thereafter, he takes possession of the book. Here, we see a use of violent language to describe

that actual act of taking the diary. He does not politely take it or even grab it; rather, he "forcibly

wrest[s] it from [her]" (*Tenant,* 1359). While reading the diary, he is faced with both Helen's

---

[97] Of Huntingdon's style of interpretation, Losano writes that "Arthur sees in Helen's artwork precisely what he wants to see: a young girl just coming to sexual awareness and waiting for his advances." This particular analysis of Huntingdon draws a parallel between him and Gilbert: in his reading of Helen's body, Gilbert is self-centered. He tries to see only that which fits his developing image of her as romantic object. Like Huntingdon, Gilbert's tendency to center his idea of Helen connects back to his desire for her; Antonia Losano, "The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 58, no. 1 (2003): 6, https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2003.58.1.1.

plans for eventual escape and, equally as important, her observations regarding his own character. Rather than endeavoring to learn from her writing, however, he instead grabs the keys to her desk drawer, gathers all her writing/painting materials and casts them into the fire. His response to reading a female text is to prevent its reproduction. In doing so, he renders her at least temporarily voiceless. Beyond this, his act also interferes with her mobility. In seizing her art supplies, Huntingdon interferes with her plans for funding her escape via independent production of art and keeps her entrapped within his household.

Contrast this with the transformation rendered over Hattersley via his own wife's writing. Just a few chapters after Huntingdon's violent reaction to the diary, a woman's writing transforms a more attentive male reader. Throughout this scene, we see consistent deference of the male reader to the female artist. The scene begins with establishing another female artist--Helen—in a position of authority. She leads Hattersley into the library—a space she has transformed into a studio—and is the one to give him his wife's writing. Within this handoff, Helen notes a connection between herself and Milicent, describing sharing the letters as doing "what [Milicent] might, and ought to -- have done herself" *(Tenant*, 1418). It is here, in a female dominated artistic space, that Hattersley reads his wife's letters. In them, he sees, like Huntingdon did within Helen's diary, the negative effects of his debauchery. However, unlike Huntingdon, he is productively inspired by these contents. Throughout the rest of the novel, Hattersley initiates a positive transformation that restores his marriage and character. Notably, here we do not see the onus of transformation placed upon the female artist. Instead, it is Hattersley who takes the initiative to transform himself, a point that will reappear in my later discussion of the novel's ending. Overall, the inclusion of two different types of reading further

centers the idea of men engaging female texts and, within the context of Gilbert reading the diary, further encourages questions regarding how Gilbert might respond in subsequent scenes.

The contents of Helen's diary, like her earlier interactions with Gilbert, prime him for an eventually transformative relationship to the female text. In establishing the text as not only feminine but also subversive, Brontë imbues it with a focus that challenges Gilbert's own perspective. Then, through including within it mention of both Hattersley and Huntingdon's relationships to female-authored text, Brontë introduces the question of how Gilbert might respond in his own reading and thematically centers his relationship to Helen's text within the novel.

2.f: Tedious Transformation: Gilbert's Balancing Act Between Progression and Regression

In the eventual return to Gilbert's outer frame, Brontë will characterize his response to Helen's diary. As has been implied, his response is ultimately a transformative one. However, this transformation possesses a tedious quality; it does not happen immediately and often features a tension between regression and progression.

Throughout Gilbert's first reaction to Helen's diary, Brontë captures this tension, portraying both Gilbert's regressive urge to center himself and his progressive urge to center Helen as both diary author and protagonist. Within his first comment on the diary, Gilbert leans into the more regressive of the two impulses. The actual text Gilbert reads has very little to do with him; primarily, it relays Helen's marriage to and escape from the abusive Arthur Huntingdon. And yet, in his first comment, Gilbert fails to reflect on any of her included experiences. Instead, he immediately laments "how cruel" it is that Helen tore out the last few pages of her diary, which he presumes mention him (*Tenant*, 1472). This first comment centers

neither Helen nor the diary entries she shared with him. Rather, it fixates on and centers

Gilbert's absence from the diary. Notably, this fixation comes at the momentary expense of

Gilbert's respect for Helen's editorial authority. Gilbert bemoans her apparently "cruel" decision

to remove the diary entries because he values so deeply his own suspected presence within them.

Even in this singular comment, the potential presence of Gilbert in the diaries takes precedence

over both the diary's actual contents and Helen's right to edit her work as she sees fit.

Gilbert's subsequent reference to the diary's actual content only serves to further decenter

its main points and lessons. After recalling Helen's likely negative perception of him, Gilbert

uses the contents of her diary to explain her apparent "prejudice" against men. He attributes this

"prejudice" to Helen's experiences with Arthur Huntingdon and his compatriots, men he

sarcastically refers to as "brilliant specimens" (*Tenant*, 1472). Although an attentive reader in

noting the malignancy of Arthur and co, Gilbert is an inattentive reader in failing to reflect upon

his connection to men like Huntingdon. As Carol A. Senf specifically and succinctly notes, "men

like Gilbert, while significantly more appealing than Huntingdon and his coterie, are also

influenced by social views that stress the inequality of men and women."[98] Yet, Gilbert only

fixates on his position "as more appealing" and fails to note how the same social views that

influence Huntingdon also in turn influence him. Unaware or ambivalent towards his own

shortcomings, he instead leans into a rather inflated image of himself as the ideal—albeit initially

misjudged—romantic suitor.

In service of this inflated self-image, Gilbert further decenters the actual Helen, making

sweeping assumptions about her as both diary author and diary protagonist. He begins by

reimagining Helen's editing process. Immediately after assuring Halford that Helen has "seen

---

[98] Carol A. Senf, "*The Tenant of Wildfell H*all: Narrative Silences and Questions of Gender," *College English* 52, no. 4 (1990): 451, https://doi.org/10.2307/377662.

her error" in misjudging him, Gilbert suggests that she has "fallen into another in the opposite extreme" and now holds him in too high of regard (*Tenant*, 1473). He then carries on to make several assumptions about why she withheld the diary's final pages, claiming that she tore them away "for fear of ministering too much to his self-conceit" (*Tenant*, 1473). Within this comment, Gilbert leaves no room for Helen to fully explain why she removed the pages; rather, he favors his own interpretation of her editing process: that she clearly removed the diary entries because she knew he could not handle the heaping and truly glowing praise contained therein. Through making this assumption, Gilbert projects his perception of Helen onto her own editing process and, in doing so, decenters her as the diary's author.

Shortly thereafter, he begins to also reimagine and re-write Helen the diary protagonist. Once again, he largely does this to bolster his own perception of self. He begins to imagine the final entries' contents in greater detail, wishing all the while that he could "have witnessed the gradual change" in her affections. In these comments, we see Gilbert project onto Helen actions and emotions that best solidify his desired role as romantic suitor. He wonders at "how much love there was in her regard" and how it might have grown in spite of her "strenuous resolutions" (*Tenant*, 1473-1474). Once again, this focus comes at the expense of Helen's actual diary. As outer frame narrator, Gilbert is responsible for contextualizing and directing the perception of Helen's inner frame. Through using this position to frame Helen's diary using his own experiences, desires, and perception of self, Gilbert interferes with a fair interpretation of Helen's actual text. He conceals her voice beneath his own. In doing so, he regresses back into the self-centered, aggressively masculine gaze he first directed towards Helen at the novel's onset.

And yet, this initial response is not completely regressive; at the very end of Gilbert's commentary, Brontë includes a small gesture towards future progress. While deep in the throes

of imagining the missing entries' contents, Gilbert suddenly interrupts himself, remarking "but now, [he] had no right to see it: all this was too sacred for any eyes but her own, and she had done well to keep it from [him]" (*Tenant*, 1474). In making this comment, he quickly both reaffirms his own lack of authority over the text and simultaneously reasserts Helen's. We see Gilbert clearly draw a distinction between his power as reader and Helen's power as author. The position of this comment only adds to this distinction: Gilbert quite literally interrupts his own attempts at re-writing/reimaging the text so as to re-center Helen and her authority. As a reader, he can only center himself so much before Helen's actual presence reasserts itself.

Of course, this comment does not acquit Gilbert of his prior remarks—he still de-centered the actual contents and purpose of Helen's diary in favor of his own (re)interpretation. Even the comment itself evidences these prior readerly mistakes. In saying that "all this was too sacred" for him to read, Gilbert refers back to his unsubstantiated theories regarding the diary's missing pages. Likewise, although Gilbert does reassert Helen's authority, he still fails to fully reflect upon the poor behavior that necessitated him reading the diary in the first place. The end result is a tension between progression and regression within the scene. In subsequent scenes, Brontë will continue to reinvoke this tension, along the way slowly inching Gilbert towards ultimate progress in his relationships with both Helen and her text.

Within the following scene, we see Gilbert begin to demonstrate clear signs of transformation. Gilbert begins by both admitting to and criticizing the flaws in his response to Helen's text. Still addressing Halford, Gilbert writes:

> "I will only make this acknowledgment, little honourable as it may be to human nature, and especially to myself,—that the former half of the narrative was, to me, more painful than the latter, not that I was at all insensible to Mrs. Huntingdon's wrongs or unmoved

by her sufferings, but, I must confess, I felt a kind of selfish gratification in watching her husband's gradual decline in her good graces, and seeing how completely he extinguished all her affection at last." (*Tenant,* 1475)

Immediately, we see a shift from his response at the end of chapter 44. While Gilbert does center himself within this comment, he simultaneously characterizes this behavior as "selfish" and lacking in honor. Gilbert's willingness to negatively frame his behavior further evidences an active transformation. In admitting to his wrongdoings, he loses his ability to ensure that Halford perceives him positively; he has disrupted his own "masculine control," as King might put it, over how he's perceived. Simultaneously, we see at least partial reference to the actual contents of Helen's diary. He notes her "sufferings" and, in doing so, takes a small step towards centering Helen. Just a few paragraphs later, we see Gilbert once again ruminate on the contents of her diary. At the very end of this paragraph, he makes a comment crucial to our analysis of his transformation. Helen's text freshly in mind, Gilbert admits to feeling a "shame and deep remorse for his conduct" (*Tenant,* 1479). The female text has therefore disrupted his self-centered male gaze and perception of self. It is not surprising, then, that Gilbert makes the following comment upon first reuniting with Helen a few pages later: "I've read it through…and I want to know if you'll forgive me—if you can forgive me" (*Tenant,* 1483).

Within Gilbert's subsequent interaction with Helen, we see this initial transformation influence his interactions with the female artist. The power of Helen's text translates into her own empowerment within this scene, in which she successfully convinces Gilbert to avoid contacting her for at least six months. Brontë could end the novel here and, in doing so, close out the text on a note of straightforward, albeit perhaps simple, transformation. However, as was mentioned earlier, Brontë instead opts for a much more complicated course of transformation in

which Gilbert oscillates between regression and progression, sometimes moving between the two in a matter of sentences.

At the forefront of this complication is Gilbert's mixed relationship to Helen's other female text: her letters to Lawrence. Within his reading of these letters, Gilbert begins to backslide. The regressive quality to this reading is multifold. First and foremost, we see within these scenes a reemergence of Gilbert's violence. Consider, for example, Gilbert's very first reading of Helen's letters. Here, he recalls seeing the letter and "by an irresistible impulse" holding out his hand, "'let me see' involuntarily pass[ing] his lips" (*Tenant*, 1572). Shortly thereafter, he reports "snatch[ing] it from [Lawrence's] hand" (*Tenant,* 1572). Although he does give the letter back, the violence—more specifically entitled violence—of the scene remains. The fact that Lawrence ultimately allows him to read the letter makes this violence all the more concerning—the narrative does not seem to push back against Gilbert's entitlement as it frequently does in his interactions with Helen. In his first reading of the letters, we see Gilbert not only center himself and his own emotions, but also do so in a way evocative of his earlier violence.

This scene is also regressive in its exclusion of Helen through both the masculinity of the physical space and lack of Helen's explicit authorial consent. The masculinity of the space becomes especially apparent when juxtaposed against the space in which Hattersley read Milicent's letters. As was discussed previously, Hattersley's reading occurs not only within the female artist's studio but also under the tutelage of a female artist. By comparison, Gilbert reads the letters in Lockwood's residence, the other man his only companion. The female author Helen remains dozens of miles away and could therefore neither consent to nor observe Gilbert's

reading even if she wanted to. In this scene, the feminine presence is removed, a masculine, homosocial connection taking its place.

This centering of maleness becomes even more egregious when we consider the problem of Helen's authorial consent. The content of Helen's letters suggests that they were not intended for Gilbert's eyes. In a letter relayed in chapter 48, for example, Helen remarks that "Mr. Markham is at liberty to make such revelations concerning me as he judges on the subject. I hope he is well; but tell him he must not think of me" (*Tenant*, 1604) Throughout this comment, we see Helen refer to Gilbert indirectly; there is no possibility for direct address. Lawrence—and not Helen's actual letter—is to relay key bits of information or instruction to Gilbert. As such, we might easily conclude that Helen did not intend for the letter itself to provide Gilbert with updates. This then casts significant doubt over the possibility of Helen having ever consented to Gilbert's letter and decenters her authorial authority within the scene.

The decentering of Helen is structurally mirrored in the interactions between inner and outer frame. When compared to his transcriptions of her diary, Gilbert's letter transcripts evidence his influence more consistently. Whereas the diary appears as one concentrated piece of writing, Gilbert intersperses the letter transcripts with sections of his own narration—sometimes even interrupting individual letters so as to include his own perspective. At other times, these transcriptions (and with it inner frame) completely disappear from the text. In their place are Gilbert's summaries, which are expectedly written in his own words. Gilbert's male reinterpretation supplants that of the female artist. The end result is a sense of regression, of Gilbert having once again de-centered a female narrative voice in favor of his distinctly masculine gaze. These scenes, then, capture a paradoxical development in Gilbert's reading of female text: the more he reads Helen's letter writing, the less he centers her voice or authority.

It is no wonder, then, that Gilbert so easily falls victim to village gossip regarding Helen in chapter 51. Within this chapter, Gilbert engages former flame Eliza in a brief conversation, during which she claims to have heard of an impending marriage between Helen and Hargrave. In response, Gilbert descends into anxiety, eventually traversing all the way to the wedding venue so as to confirm or deny whether it involves Helen. Within Gilbert's response, we see full evidence of the extent to which he has decentered and forgotten female text and author. Throughout Helen's writing, she evidences a clear distaste for Hargrave, making it exceedingly unlikely that she would marry him. Had Gilbert kept her writing fully in mind, he likely would have dismissed Eliza's rumors as clichéd village gossip. Likewise, had he reestablished contact with Helen at the end of their no-contact period, he also would have been unlikely to believe such rumors. Beyond highlighting the consequences of his reading, this mistake also precipitates the events of the following chapter, in which Brontë will largely resolve the tension between regression and progression while recentering Helen's voice.

Within the lead-up to the proposal scene, we once again witness a balance between regression and progression. Shortly after the wedding incident, Gilbert travels to Helen's residence in hopes of assessing her true feelings. Gilbert is not completely without reason for doing so. In her final letter to Lawrence, Helen reveals that Huntingdon has recently passed away. As Gilbert notes at the onset of Chapter 52, "there would be no impropriety in [seeing her] now that her husband had been dead above a year" (*Tenant,* 1731). To some extent, his decision to see Helen originates in an attentive reading of both her diaries and letters.

And yet, as is often the case with Gilbert, he quickly thereafter moves to decenter Helen and her texts. Within prior scenes, Gilbert largely de-centers Helen in service of an unduly positive conception of self; however, within this scene, he centers instead a negative self-image

at the expense of Helen and her texts. Upon finally reaching Helen's residence, Gilbert decides it best to abandon his plans of seeing her. He cites a number of reasons including, but not limited to, the fact that she "never sent [him] a line or a message", is of a higher social class than him, and that he shouldn't "disturb her peace by awakening those feelings" (*Tenant*, 1755). Within his first listed reason, we once again see Gilbert center his own emotions and, in doing so, forget key pieces of context. In bemoaning that Helen never sent him a letter, Gilbert forgets that he too never sent her a letter, in his case due to a cited pride.

When contextualized solely by general ideas of class and marriage, Gilbert's second reason appears partially justified. However, his specific concerns grow less understandable when contextualized by Helen's personal ideals. Within neither her writing nor her conversations with Gilbert does Helen mention an aversion towards him on account of social class. In fact, if anything, she expresses within her writing an aversion towards her own social class and the men who belong to it. Helen attributes the impropriety of her relationship with Gilbert to her status as a married woman—not to his status as a gentleman farmer.

In the final excuse, however, we do see evidence of a more productive transformation. Gilbert, despite his desire to see Helen, considers her own feelings in the scene. When even compared to his initial response to her diaries, in which he considers first and foremost his own hurt at not being included, his behavior appears much reformed. Although he is not necessarily correct or fully attentive in assuming she wouldn't want to see him, he still demonstrates character growth. What we see then in this scene is an unrefined or partial transformation. Gilbert possesses a new demeanor but does not know how to properly execute it. Within the subsequent proposal scene, Brontë will therefore both refine Gilbert's transformation in a move that evidences Helen's authority one final time.

It is in this state of continued anxiety and defeat that Helens shortly thereafter finds him. Throughout their ensuing conversation, in which Helen eventually proposes, we see the female author refine and correct the male reader's application and interpretation of her texts. Helen repeatedly adjusts how Gilbert applies and learns from her texts. Consistently, we see Helen extensively refine Gilbert's newfound humility. For example, in response to Gilbert's attempted explanation as to why he never wrote to her, Helen remarks that "you judged of others by yourself"—a reference perhaps to the self-focused component to Gilbert's newfound humility (*Tenant,* 1772). In other moments, Helen seeks to correct his recent aversion to corresponding with her. Overall, throughout the scene, we see Helen progressively recenter herself within and reconnect herself to Gilbert's transformation.

This culminates in her—and not Gilbert—initiating the proposal. Apart from showing her initiative, this moment also stands as significant in that it allows Helen to describe and define herself. She leads into her proposal with a characterization of self, an important gesture given Gilbert's initial attempts at reading her body as he saw fit. Speaking metaphorically of her hardships, she remarks that "the rose is not so fragrant as a summer flower, but it has stood through hardships none of *them* could bear" (*Tenant,* 1774). In describing herself as such and then proposing, Helen further moves to ensure that Gilbert enters engagement with and eventually marries Helen's conception of herself—not his. Gilbert, meanwhile, remains in a position of relative subjugation and humility. Crucially, this transformation requires very little labor on the part of the female artist. Across the text, Gilbert primarily works through the contents of Helen's writing on his own, only reuniting with her on occasion. Meanwhile, Helen lives out her own life at a distance. In maintaining a separation between the two, Brontë

facilitates a transformation that does not require Helen, the female artist, to re-adopt her "angel" persona.

This proposal scene concludes Gilbert's recollection of their developing relationship. The novel itself ends with Gilbert making a few remaining comments to Halford as way of closing out his letter. This final emphasis of the correspondence between men stands as important. Within this masculine correspondence, described by Wettlaufer as a "homosocial circuit,"[99] the female narrative remains present and relevant. Although the conversation is between two men, it largely regards a female text proven transformative in its relationship to the male reader. Gilbert, already having been transformed by Helen's text, now shares it with another man. In doing so, he likewise includes details in how he develops in his ability to read and apply its contents. Nonetheless, as will be discussed within the following section, the specifics of this ending have generated lingering questions deserving of further consideration.

2g. What Ifs, Maybes, and Excepts: Caveats to my Argument

"Though it may be tempting to read the events in the framing narrative as representing a recovery from the events recounted in the embedded one, such a meliorist view is challenged by the fact that the framing narrative finds Helen remarried to a man who, while not the rake that Arthur Huntingdon was, is capable, like Arthur, of violence and cowardice…" [100]

---

[99] Wettlaufer also carries on to describe the letters a tool through which "art and fiction" are "focalized through a male subject and addressed to a male audience." Within her analysis, this gaze is in continuous opposition with that of Helen's. However, within mine, I see an eventual cross-connection between the two in which her narrative gaze encourages Gilbert to decenter himself; Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, "Brontë's Portraits of Romantic Resistance: *The Tenant of Wildfell* Hall." In *Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Painting and the Novel in France and Britain, 1800–1860,* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 227, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16rdd1n.13.
[100] Tess O'Toole, "Siblings and Suitors in the Narrative Architecture of '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 4 (1999): 716, https://doi.org/10.2307/1556270.

Within her analysis, excerpted above, O'Toole above expresses skepticism over the supposed feminist undertones of *Tenant's* ending. To her, "Gilbert is an oddly unsuitable partner for Helen." His unworthiness in turn casts doubt upon whether the text properly transforms his character. This particular criticism fits into a broader debate regarding the extent to which one can or should read *Tenant's* ending as empowering, especially with respect to the female artist Helen. Within it, scholars tend to focus on one of two topics: the extent to which Gilbert transforms at the novel's end, as O'Toole does, and/or Helen's physical or figurative entrapment at the novel's conclusion.

The first vein of criticism, although indeed valid in its recognition of Gilbert's many transgressions, seems to attribute to him a stagnancy not found within the actual text. In a response to a criticism of this vein, Janina Hornosty identifies an "extremely and unjustifiably selective" element to their analysis. [101] As was discussed in prior sections, Gilbert undergoes a painful, and slow, transformation in *Tenant's* final chapters. At times, this transformation indeed features an element of regression—albeit one that Brontë largely resolves by the novel's conclusion. This continues through the proposal scene where Gilbert's new persona continues to face pushback and refinement from Helen, who sees his newfound hesitancy as contextually unnecessary. The scene ends with Helen, rather than Gilbert, proposing in an act that allows her to voice, on her own terms, her desire and perception of self. Within the dynamics of this scene, we witness a notable change from the brash, self-centered Gilbert of the novel's earlier chapters in particular. It is therefore hard to deny that Gilbert changes or transforms across the novel.

---

[101] Hornosty specifically responds to Maggie Berg's "Let me have its bowels then": Violence, Sacrificial Structure, and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall"*, which associates Gilbert with a "carno-phallocentric" "brotherhood" deeply connected to male violence; Janina Hornosty, "Let's Not Have its Bowels Quite so Quickly, Then: A Response to Maggie Berg," *The Journal of the Brontë Society* 39, vo. 2 (2014): 130, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1179/1474893214Z.000000000105?scroll=top&needAccess=true

This is, of course, not to say that Gilbert's transformation is complete nor that he ends the novel as a complete paragon of male virtue. Russell Poole, for example, posits that "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* simultaneously reforms and perpetuates the practices of Brontë's society."[102] He in particular takes issue with Gilbert's treatment of Eliza and Jane Wilson.[103] Within the framework of my analysis, the issue arises less from these incidents themselves and more from how Gilbert retroactively describes them. In his descriptions of either scene, Gilbert retroactively avoids demonstrating extreme remorse for these actions or comments. This absence stands as striking in comparison with his expressed remorse for his treatment of Helen/Lockwood and suggests that his transformation is not all-encompassing and seems to favor those already in his good favor or opinion.

As was mentioned earlier, the second vein of criticism takes issue with Helen's entrapment at the novel's end. Here, entrapment usually refers at least in part to the use of the frame narrative device and usually mentions alongside that either the historical legal context or lack of a feminine artistic presence at the novel's end. Writing on the frame device, Catherine Quirk makes an argument of the first type, positing that "much as her narrative voice is enclosed, allows for, and is made authoritative only by way of its inclusion in her second husband's text, Helen herself remains under the control of nineteenth-century patriarchal social structures."[104] In other words, Helen's position in the inner frame represents her lack of mobility under patriarchy.

---

[102] Russell Poole, "Cultural Reformation and Cultural Reproduction in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33, no. 4 (1993): 859, https://doi.org/10.2307/450753.

[103] Of Gilbert's treatment of both female characters, Poole writes that "his revelations about Jane Wilson, though well-meant, are as excessively brutal as they are inadequately substantiated…As to physical brutality, although he has expressed contrition to Lawrence, nevertheless we see him giving Eliza's wrist a vindictive, "pretty severe" squeeze when she teases him about Helen's supposed remarriage"; Russell Poole, "Cultural Reformation and Cultural Reproduction in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33, no. 4 (1993): 863, https://doi.org/10.2307/450753.

[104] p. 232, Quirk, Catherine Quirk, "Consent and Enclosure in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall:* 'You needn't read it all; but take it home with you,'" *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 138, (2020): 232, doi:10.1353/vct.2020.0018.

Carol A. Senf connects the frame to concerns of silence, stating "furthermore the very structure of Brontë's novels reveals that such a narrative pattern is typical of women's lives: their histories are likely to remain shrouded in silence unless the men in their lives say otherwise."[105] In these two comments we see parallel concerns: that of the narrative representing either legal enclosure or devoicing.

The first of the two, when considered alone, perhaps falls too easily into traditional conceptions of narrative frame. Elizabeth Langland, in her discussion of *Tenant's* narrative transgressions, writes that this critical discussion "suggests certain conclusions about priority and hierarchy" that need not necessarily apply to every frame narrative. [106] Without further information from the novel, one might just as easily interpret Helen's position as inner frame narrator as being a sign of her centrality to the text as a sign of her enclosure within it. This is especially true when considering the transformative capabilities demonstrated by her text. Consideration of voice alongside Helen's narrative enclosure, however, does introduce concerns. Although indeed empowered as an artist and writer throughout the text, Helen does remain completely silent at the novels end as Gilbert shares her diary with a male friend. We know not whether she still paints nor whether she still writes. In fact, we aren't even sure of whether she fully granted Gilbert consent in sharing her diary. With this in mind, Senf is particularly astute in recognizing Gilbert's responsibility for voicing Helen as outer frame narrator. Whether Helen speaks as the novel closes now depends completely on her husband Gilbert—a dynamic that mirrors the legal treatment of men versus women in marriage at the time. Consideration of her

[105] Carol A. Senf, "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Narrative Silences and Questions of Gender," *College English* 52, no. 4 (1990): 455, https://doi.org/10.2307/377662.
[106] Elizabeth Langland, "Dialogue and Narrative Transgressions in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." In *Telling Tales : Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature and Culture*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 33.

absent voice in turn invites a reappraisal of Quirk's argument, for there's now additional textual invitation to apply legal context to the structure of the narrative.

With this in mind, we locate our second caveat: the female artist is not completely independent of her surrounding social context. Helen ultimately remains, at the novel's end, dependent on Gilbert for her voicing. Although indeed still empowered and influential in her artistic capabilities, Helen remains bound to the social context of her time. Rather than viewing this dynamic as a fault or flaw of the novel and its feminism, I rather see it as credit to the novel's connection to the social climate in which it was written. Consider, once again, the social context I established at the beginning of my thesis: by and large, women were at a disadvantage in public facing, professional spaces. This is not, of course to say, that they did not participate in public discourse or professional art; it is merely to say that they faced significant roadblocks and were expected to function within a male dominated space. Their creativity likely came with caveats. Anne Brontë, dedicated to what she labels as "truth" in her preface, [107] perhaps sought to create an imagining of the empowered female artist who was nonetheless grounded in the truth of the surrounding social climate.

---

[107] Anne Brontë. 'Preface to the Second Edition', *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. by S. Davies, (London: Penguin Random House, 1996).

Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions:

Within her introduction to "Gender and Layered Narrative," N.M. Jacobs notes a tendency amongst scholars "to see Anne and Emily at opposite ends of the clan's[108] continuum: Emily the wild pagan, Anne the mild Christian, with Charlotte somewhere in between."[109] This in turn seems to have encouraged a view of Anne and Emily's novels as oppositional to one another. Recently, however, some Brontë scholars have moved towards identifying similarities between the two. James Quinnell, for example, claims that "contrary to the idea that Anne wrote her novels as a corrective to the wild ideas of her sister, she and Emily were of one mind."[110]We see this like-mindedness in their respective explorations of how men engage women's narratives. As my thesis demonstrates, both sisters use the narrative frame in order to center a relationship between male audience and female-delivered story. In both texts, the resulting interactions between male audience, female storyteller, and female text subvert a patriarchal gaze.

Of course, their methods for subversion are not identical—a point made clear from the onset of my thesis. In Emily's text, Lockwood stagnates, his self-centered approach to female narrative culminating in a lack of change. He therefore ends the novel much as he started it: a southern gentleman distant from the moors in which Brontë sets the novel. In Anne's text, Gilbert transforms via his reading. Through his active engagement with Helen's diary, Gilbert ends the novel less self-centered and domineering than he was at its onset. Of course, this transformation is not without its caveats, resulting in an empowerment of female author still very

---

[108] Clan: refers to the Brontë family—the three sisters in particular.
[109] p. 204, N.M. Jacobs, "Gender and Layered Narrative in '*Wuthering Heights'* and '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 16, no. 3 (1986): 204, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225153.
[110] James Quinnell, 'A distinct family likeness': A Reappraisal of the Creative Partnership between Anne and Emily Brontë, *Brontë Studies* 45, no. 3 (2020): 258, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14748932.2020.1756225

much connected to its surrounding social context. However, although limited by the circumstances of the text, Helen's diary nonetheless still has a notable impact on its male reader.

The same might be said of the Victorian women writer. For the purposes of underscoring the significance of the Brontë sisters' use of narrative frame, I emphasized the challenges facing Victorian female authors in my introduction. However, despite these challenges (or caveats), women—such as the Brontë sisters—wrote and published extensively during the era. According to Gilbert and Gubar's formative analysis of the era, novels in particular often featured a certain subversive quality, even as they sought to conform to conventions of the era. Equally radical is Nancy Armstrong's brand of analysis. According to Armstrong[111], women did not subvert convention but rather gained a specific form of power via adherence to it, especially with respect to that which was domestic.

Armstrong's analysis offers future studies an approach to gender and literary convention different from the one I take. Within my own work, I largely analyze *Wuthering Heights* and *Tenant* using Gilbert and Gubar's idea of "subversion." In my analysis, this chiefly applies to the tendency of both texts to encase within a male framed story a progressive account of the empowered female text. Within Armstrong's analysis, she instead identifies an influence and power inherent to the conventional domestic novel. Application of this theoretical framework to *Tenant* in particular may lend new scholarly insights into why Anne might have concluded the novel with an image of domesticity. More specifically, consideration of a unique power vested in the domestic novel may more easily justify or explain *Tenant's* final emphasis on marriage.

---

[111] Of domestic writing's power, Armstrong writes that "the belief that domestic life and moral sensibility constituted a female domain was much more than a sop to the woman. Although it did not seem to be political or economic on the surface, female authority was nevertheless real, for the language of sexual relations itself was considered acceptable feminine writing"; Nancy Armstrong, "The Rise of Female Authority in the Novel," In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: a Political History of the Nove*l, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 50.

Future studies also might consider moving beyond the frame device so as to analyze

different components of narrative structure and voice. Amongst Brontë novels, *Villette* stands as

an obvious subject for this type of research. Written by Charlotte Brontë and published in 1853,

Villette traces the journey of Lucy Snowe, an orphaned woman employed as a teacher.

Throughout the text's duration, Lucy Snowe frequently mentions and analyzes art, especially that

which is related to or produced by women. She also, notably, serves as a sort of female

storyteller in that she delivers the story of her own life. The frame narrative is absent from the

text, as is a frame narrator. However, a different component of the text may function well within

an analysis of narrative style/structure as it relates to gender and storytelling: that of Lucy

Snowe's "challenging" narrative voice.

Scholarship often identifies within Lucy's voice a frustrating and/or unreliable quality.

Kristen Pond notes that, despite narrating a seeming "autobiography, Lucy withholds key details

of the beginning and the ending of her life story and, at times, refuses to divulge information

with no explanation."[112] Scholarship, in analyzing the difficulty of Lucy, has moved towards

connecting it to conversations of power. Gregory O'Dea specifically connects his conversation

of power to the relationship between reader and narrator, stating that "in Lucy Snowe, Brontë has

designed a voice that challenges the very essence of the reader/narrator relationship."[113]Kristen

Pond connects Lucy's voice to the "illusion of access the first-person narrator provides," which

she further connects to the reading and writing of autobiographies. In future analyses, this idea—

of power between reader and author-narrator—might fit nicely into further considerations of

---

[112] Kristen Pond. "The Ethics of Silence in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*." *Studies in English Literature*, 1500 – 1900 57, no. 4 (2017): 771, https://proxy.wm.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ethics-silence-charlotte-brontës-villette/docview/2157639543/se-2?accountid=15053, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sel.2017.0034.
[113] Gregory S. O'Dea, "Narrator and Reader in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*." *South Atlantic Review* 53, no. 1 (1988): 41, https://doi.org/10.2307/3200400.

gender within the text, especially as it relates to autobiographical women's writing. Through this, scholarship might complement my analyses of Emily and Anne's work by adding appropriate consideration of Charlotte's.

Bibliography:

Abrams, M. H. *Natural Supernaturalism : Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*.
New York: Norton, 1973.

Allot, Miriam Farris. *The Brontës, the Critical Heritage.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,
1974.

Armstrong, Nancy. "The Rise of Female Authority in the Novel." In *Desire and Domestic
Fiction: a Political History of the Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Baldridge, Cate. "Voyeuristic Rebellion: Lockwood's Dream and the Reader of '*Wuthering
Heights.'" Studies in the Novel* 20, no. 3 (1988): 274–87,
http://www.jstor.org/stable/29532580.

Brontë, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, edited by Stevie Davies. London: Penguin Random
House UK, 1996.
— 'Preface to the Second Edition', *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, edited by Stevie Davies.
London: Penguin Random House UK, 1996.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette.* edited by Helen M. Cooper. London: Penguin Random House UK,
2004.

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. London: Penguin Random House UK, 2002.

Carnell, Rachel K. "Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell
Hall." Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53, no. 1 (1998): 1–24,
https://doi.org/10.2307/2902968.

David, Deirde et al. *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel. 2nd ed*. Edited by Deidre
David. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Easley, Alexis. "Gender, Authorship, and the Periodical Press." In *The History of British*

Women's Writing, 1830-1880: Volume Six, 39-55. Edited by Lucy Hartley. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

--- "Making a Debut," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, 15-28. Edited by Linda H. Peterson. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015.

Flint, Kate. "Travel Reading." In *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience & Victorian Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.

--- "The Victorian novel and its readers." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel. 2nd ed*, 133-263. Edited by Deidre David. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Frangipane, Nicholas. "Lockwood the Liar: a Call to Reconsider *Wuthering Heights* as a Metafictional Work on the Limits of Narrative," *Brontë Studies* 41, no. 1 (2016): 29-38, 10.1080/14748932.2015.1123914

Frow, John. "The Literary Frame." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 16, no. 2 (1982): 25–30, https://doi.org/10.2307/3332274.

Gilbert, Sandra M and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*: *the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

---Gilbert, Sandra M. and Sudan Gubar. "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxieties of Authorship." *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 218-402. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979

Grudin, Peter D. "*Wuthering Heights*: The Question of Unquiet Slumbers." *Studies in the Novel* 6, no. 4 (1974): 389–407, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29531684.

Hartley, Lucy et al. *The History of British Women's Writing, 1830-1880: Volume Six*. Edited by

Lucy Hartley. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Henderson, Desirée. *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st Century Readers*. London: Routledge, 2019.

--- "Reading the Diary as Literature." *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st Century Readers*, 239-345. London: Routledge, 2019.

Hornosty, Janina. "Let's Not Have its Bowels Quite so Quickly, Then: A Response to Maggie Berg." *The Journal of the Brontë Society* 39, vo. 2 (2014): 130, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1179/1474893214Z.000000000105?scroll=top&needAccess=true

Hughes, Linda. "The Professional Woman Writer." In *The History of British Women's Writing, 1830-1880: Volume Six*, 56-70. Edited by Lucy Hartley. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 56-70.

Irwin, Bonnie D. "Frame Tales and Oral Tradition." *Oral Tradition* 18, no. 1 (2003): 125-126. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/ort.2004.0023.

Jacobs, Carol. "*Wuthering Heights: At the Threshold of Interpretation*." *Boundary 2* 7, no. 3 (1979): 49–72, https://doi.org/10.2307/303164

Jacobs, N. M. "Gender and Layered Narrative in '*Wuthering Heights*' and '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.*'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 16, no. 3 (1986): pp. 204–19, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225153.

King, Elizabeth. ""Uncivil Usage": Shifting Forms of Control in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 138, (2020): 124-140, doi:10.1353/vct.2020.0009.

Krebs, Paula M. "Folklore, Fear, and the Feminine: Ghosts and Old Wives' Tales in

'*Wuthering Heights*.'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26, no. 1, (1998): 41–52, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058402.

Langland, Elizabeth. *Telling Tales: Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature and Culture*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002.

McKibben, Robert C. "The Image of the Book in *Wuthering Heights*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 15, no. 2 (1960): 159–69, https://doi.org/10.2307/2932453.

Moore, George. *Conversations in Ebury Street, by George Moore*. London: Heinemann, 1924.

Morse, Deborah. "'I speak of those I do know': Witnessing as Radical Gesture in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne,* 103-126. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001.

Nelles, William. *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative*. New York: P. Lang, 1997.

--- "Introduction." *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative*, 1-8. New York: P. Lang, 1997.

Oates, Joyce Carol. "The Magnanimity of '*Wuthering Heights*.'" *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 2 (1982): 435–49, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343330.

O'Dea, Gregory S. "Narrator and Reader in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*." *South Atlantic Review* 53, no. 1 (1988): 41–57, https://doi.org/10.2307/3200400.

O'Toole, Tess. "Siblings and Suitors in the Narrative Architecture of 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.'" *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900 39, no. 4 (1999): 715–31, https://doi.org/10.2307/1556270.

Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "accessible." www.oed.com/view/Entry/1034

Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "frame story." www.oed.com/view/Entry/74151

Palmer, Beth. "Assuming the Role of Editor." In *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, 59-72. Eddited by Linda H. Peterson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

Peterson, Linda H., editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

---"Working with Publishers." In *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing,* 43-55*.* Edited by Linda H. Peterson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015

Pond, Kristen. "The Ethics of Silence in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*." *Studies in English Literature*, 1500 – 1900 57, no. 4, 2017, 771-797. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2157639543?accountid=15053&parentSessionId=rk LTXHhl6wYh1MR62EpUqBElDvdRT3D89BAUh3rEWgo%3D&pq-origsite=primo

Poole, Russell. "Cultural Reformation and Cultural Reproduction in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall." Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33, no. 4 (1993): 859–73, https://doi.org/10.2307/450753.

Psomiades, Kathy Alexis. "The Marriage Plot in Theory." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 43, no. 1 (2010): 53–59, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27764369

Quinnell, James. "'A distinct family likeness': A Reappraisal of the Creative Partnership between Anne and Emily Brontë", *Brontë Studies* 45, no. 3 (2020): 258-271, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14748932.2020.1756225

Quirk, Catherine. "Consent and Enclosure in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: "You needn't read it all; but take it home with you"." *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 138, (2020): 231-241. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/vct.2020.0018.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. Rev. ed. Gothic Studies and

 Dissertations. New York: Arno, 1980.

Senf, Carol A. "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Narrative Silences and Questions of

 Gender." *College English* 52, no. 4 (1990): pp. 446–56,

 https://doi.org/10.2307/377662.

Smith, Sheila. "'At Once Strong and Eerie': The Supernatural in *Wuthering Heights* and Its Debt

 to the Traditional Ballad." *The Review of English Studies* 43, no. 172 (1992): 498–517,

 http://www.jstor.org/stable/518730.

Stoneman, Patsy. "Feminist Criticism of '*Wuthering Heights*.'" *Critical Survey* 4, no. 2

 (1992): 147–53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41555645.

Tarr, Clayton Carlyle. *Gothic Stories Within Stories: Frame Narratives and Realism in the

 Genre*, *1790-1900*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2017.

Thormählen, Marianne. 'Horror and disgust': Reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *Brontë

 Studies* 44, no. 1 (2019): 5-19, DOI: 10.1080/14748932.2019.1525872

Watson, Melvin R. "'*Wuthering Heights' and the Critics*." *The Trollopian* 3, no. 4 (1949):

 243–63, https://doi.org/10.2307/3044506.

Wettlaufer, Alexandra K. "Brontë's Portraits of Romantic Resistance: *The Tenant of Wildfell

 Hall.*" *Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Painting and the Novel in France and

 Britain, 1800–186*0, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011, pp. 221–42,

 https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16rdd1n.13.

Williams, Anne. "Natural Supernaturalism in '*Wuthering Heights*.'" *Studies in Philology*

 82, no. 1 (1985) 104–27, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174198.

Wolf, Werner. "Introduction." In *Framing Borders in Literature and Other*

Media. Edited by Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Acknowledgements:

I would first and foremost like to thank my advisor Deborah Morse for her invaluable feedback and encouragement throughout the past year. Without her, completing my thesis would have been completely impossible. I would similarly like to thank my committee members: Kim Wheatley, Suzanne Raitt, and Kathrin Levitan. Thank you for your thoughtful questions and helpful feedback.

To Kate Kowalski, who also received Honors in English: I could write a whole thesis about how much your friendship means to me. Thank you for your engaging conversations, careful feedback, and endless encouragement. I could think of no better person to share a freshman dorm room and honors advisor with. (Also, visit Yorkshire for me while in Europe this year!).

The support of other friends and peers was equally invaluable. Thank you to my housemates: Hannah Dahl, Virginia Hicks, Martha Rose, Christina Sabochick, and Hayley Scheir. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and patience. To Martha in particular: thank you for the cups of coffee. Thank you as well to the other English honors students: our group chat was a life-saver. Finally, thank you to all of my friends for attending my presentations, asking for updates on the thesis, and offering general support/encouragement.

I'd also like to thank the English teachers and professors whose classes eventually led to me writing this thesis. This especially applies to Dr. Troutman, whose 12th grade AP Lit class convinced me to major in English at W&M. Although I completed my honors thesis in English, I've primarily dedicated my time in college to developmental biology research. I'd like to briefly thank my Bio Lab PI Dr. Saha and lab partner Aaron Stone—thank you for being so understanding of how my thesis added a new degree of chaos to my schedule.

Finally, I'd like to thank my parents and brother for listening to endless rambling updates regarding my thesis. To my parents: thank you for encouraging me to keep writing—you believed in me long before I ever believed in myself. To my brother: senior honors thesis in film, perhaps?